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# BARRIE

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By the Same Author

*Poetry*

DOWN HERE THE HAWTHORN

*Fiction*

SNOW OVER ELDEN

THE COMELY LASS

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# BARRIE

*by*

THOMAS MOULT,



LONDON: JONATHAN CAPE LTD.

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## INTRODUCTION

SIR JAMES BARRIE, who once belonged to Scotland and now belongs to the world, stands by himself among living authors. Master of two arts, and gaining extraordinary fame, first as novelist and later as dramatist, he yet holds a paradoxical position. For while his work in the theatre may be claimed to have been a profound influence in the revolt against what is known as 'Ibsenism,' and while no English-speaking writer is held in such affectionate regard by readers and playgoers alike, his genius has consistently been denied adequate appreciation.

The present study is offered as an impartial endeavour to estimate his life's work. In the making of it the author has introduced a certain amount of biographical detail, but he believes that it is no more than Montaigne would have considered necessary in his own case for the fulfilment of his famous assurance that although the world may know him by his book, it must know 'my booke by me.' The *personalia* which is consequently used in the text is intended to serve as its illumination. In some measure this *personalia* has been gleaned from Barrie's own writings; but cordial acknowledgment is especially due to Mr. J. A. Hammerton, whose *J. M. Barrie and His Books*, issued twenty-seven years ago, contains much valuable information about Barrie's early life as journalist and novelist. Mr. Hammerton was at one time editor of the newspaper on which Barrie's literary career may be said to have begun, and students will always owe a great

deal to his researches. Mr. H. M. Walbrook, author of *J. M. Barrie and the Theatre*, the biographers of Charles Frohman, and friends of Sir James Barrie and of the author have also been most helpful. To each of them, and to his wife also, whose assistance and encouragement have been untiring, is offered a specific word of thanks. For his use of passages from Barrie's works, which are published by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton, Messrs. Cassells, and Messrs. Constable and Company, he wishes to make full acknowledgment.

THOMAS MOULT

London, October 18, 1927.

# B A R R I E

## CHAPTER ONE

### Southward From Kirriemuir

★

I

THE little red town of Kirriemuir, in Forfarshire, Scotland, is hardly else than a huddled, storm-beaten village even to-day, although three thousand people may be counted there, and for at least a hundred years it could have boasted a market square if its pride were stung to it. But villages mis-termed manufacturing towns, and, for that matter, unexaggerated hamlets and 'clachans' — 'It is Englishmen who use the word "clachan,"' J. M. Barrie has written, 'though truth to tell we Highlanders are not sure what it means' — notoriously become more eligible for the proud places in literary history than many a braggart city. And Kirriemuir, that stands above a lovely glen through which the Gairie flows, and is distant by six miles from Forfar at the end of a branch railway, has grown glamorous with the pride which is known also at Alloway in Ayrshire, as well as Edinburgh. For in one of its 'houses jumbled together in a cup' — the cup being moulded of the Grampian Mountains — on the ninth day of May, 1860, was born James Matthew Barrie, destined to help the world discover afresh the vital unalterable truth made manifest in their several ways by Burns and Scott and Stevenson,



that in art, as in religion, men seek first for the things that actual life cannot give them.

He has done so through the medium of two arts. His achievement as a prose-writer and playwright is uncommon enough to be in some ways definitely unique and yet of the kind which may readily be appreciated and acclaimed. 'The poor beasts,' sighed Gustave Flaubert, 'who believe in the actuality of things'; and when this young man of the North, following after (and preceding) so many other worthy Scotsmen, came down from the hills to London (by way of Dumfries Academy, Edinburgh University, and a Nottingham newspaper office) it is possible that his artistic consciousness was already being affected by some such thought as Flaubert had expressed with consummate irony. He could not fail to observe, intellectually, for the right guidance of his impulse, that always there are weary, disillusioned people who yearn to escape what Charles Lamb once called the eternal tormenting unappeasable vigilance, the lidless dragon eyes of contemporary materialism. And when he had played himself in at authorship (to borrow from the admirable jargon of cricket) Barrie easily avoided oppressing his fellow-men with any further reminder of time and decay, except to lead the already oppressed into a life unburdened. Therefore his literary offering has not been the customary mess of unromantic, actualistic pottage in artistic shape. He has not merely hinted instead at an existence in which the exquisite secret of happiness is

revealed. He has folded back the curtain. And because this existence is to be discovered on the borderland of wonder and eeriness, the art in which he gives rainbow-coloured revelations of it may be termed realistic as opposed to actualistic, and classified as the art of true romance.

The word 'romance' has often been misused, and will doubtless be misused again. But it is a vital word, 'one of the great words,' Alice Meynell declared, 'like God and love, joy and truth, which however they may be interpreted, will always have mystery and beauty.' In each of them is the promise of escape into visionary realms wholly remote from ordinary life, and that yet are life. 'Come unto these yellow sands and there take hands' is an example of numerous passages in which Shakespeare held out that promise: and the reader of Tennyson's poetry hears 'the horns of elfland faintly blowing.' Coleridge, too, nearly all through his poetry, that of 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel' and 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' especially, showed that he believed the greatest function of art to be this of opening barred casements for our human eyes whenever we seek flight, or remoteness, or that most envied thing of all, the state of eternal youthfulness, the Country of the Ever-Young. And: 'What if this art be of the imagination, of magic and romance?' demanded Professor Patrick Geddes in 'The Interpreter.' 'What if it be but dreams?' We are such stuffs as dreams are made on. 'What if it be but magic and romance? These things are not

ancient and dead, but modern and increasing. For wherever a man learns power over Nature, there is Magic; wherever he carries out an ideal into Life, there is Romance.'

## II

James Matthew Barrie — we hesitate to write down his middle name because he has said it is so long since he spelt it that he cannot remember whether there is a single or a double 't' in it — was to serve an arduous and varied term of apprenticeship before he made any contribution of importance to the romantic literature of escape. In the absence of evidence to show that he began his writing career while he was yet a child, the initial records of his literary activity belong to the years at a school which has been pictured delightfully in *Sentimental Tommy* and at Dumfries Academy, when he had a prominent part in the production of the school magazine. A feast in black and white of the gorgeous irresponsible fun that seems to be a monopoly of undergraduates and collegians (to fade out of them, alas, as they exchange the jester's cap and bells for the drab cloak of responsibility), this school magazine, appropriately called *The Clown*, has become a rarity for which book-collectors have been known, since Barrie entered into his fame, to offer fifty or sixty guineas a set. And little wonder, for one of the volumes contains a serial contribution

entitled 'Reckollections of a Skoolmaster: Edited by James Barrie, M.A., A.S.S., LL.D.'

Sir James Barrie, as that 'M.A., A.S.S.,' etc. eventually became — he was made a baronet on the King's Birthday, 1913, in his fifty-third year — has related many a good story, touched with reflective wistfulness, about his boyhood and school-life. When he became a student at Dumfries he encountered his first great man. A 'very great man,' he has called him: Thomas Carlyle, who went there to visit his sister and a literary friend named Thomas Aird. Barrie often saw Carlyle 'in his great shovel hat and cloak and thunderous staff — Jove coming down for a stroll in his favourite county.' But Carlyle showed a deplorable lack of discernment on those occasions, for he utterly ignored the hero-worshipping academic whose fame was soon to be as world-wide as his own. Scores of times the young Barrie doffed his cap to him on the high road, and never did he succeed in drawing the faintest response. It is to be stated in extenuation that the philosopher's moroseness must have been chronic at that period: he had lost his wife, and thus lost nearly everything. And Barrie has told more than once of the mortification of an ambitious person who, desiring to boast of having been spoken to by Carlyle, once asked him how far it was to Lockerbie. 'But he just pointed with his staff to a milestone and stalked on.'

When Sir James Barrie received the freedom of the borough of Dumfries in 1924 he acknow-

ledged the gift by declaring that the five years that he spent there as a scholar at the Academy were 'probably the happiest of my life, for indeed I have loved the place.' There it was that he began 'to engage secretly in literary pursuits.' As though unconsciously preparing for his apprenticeship to the craft of fiction he 'devoured, when in funds, penny dreadfuls, magazines containing exclusively sanguinary matter, largely tales about heroic highwaymen and piracy on the high seas.' Thus he revealed himself as the possessor of tastes in common with Robert Louis Stevenson, who ultimately became his friend, though they were separated by the waters of two oceans. He has recalled that 'many years afterwards, Stevenson, writing to me from Samoa of a visit he had lately paid to Sydney, described how he had gone into a bookseller's shop where they showed him all the newest and choicest books. But he said to them, "I want no thoughtful works to-day. Show me *Sixteen-String Jack the Footpad* or *Bloody Bill the Buccaneer*."'

It was Barrie's boyish admiration of Fenimore Cooper, author of the super-'penny dreadfuls,' that gained for him the first friend he made in Dumfries. A very amusing record of their introductory meeting has been preserved. During his first day at the Academy a boy came up to him in the playground, looked him over from head to foot, and asked: 'What's your high jump?' Barrie answered, 'Three and a-half. What's yours?' The other boy said: 'Four. What's your

long jump?" Barrie said: 'Six. What's yours?' The other boy said: 'Seven. What's your hundred yards?' Barrie said he didn't know, but what was the other boy's? And the other boy said, 'Five secs. less than yours.' At this Barrie saw through the dodge: but his wrath turned away immediately, for the boy was heard to utter the one word 'Pathfinder,' showing that he, like Barrie himself luckily, was an admirer of Fenimore Cooper. 'I replied,' says Barrie, 'with the same brevity, "Chingachgook." "Hawkeye," said he. "The Sarpint," I replied. "I knew you had read about them," he said, "as soon as I saw you." I asked him how he knew, and he said he knew it by my cut. I was uncertain what a "cut" was — I am not certain that I know now — but when he said he liked my cut I had the sense to say that I liked his cut too. . . . "Do you remember," he asked, "how Pathfinder laughed?" And I said, "Yes, he laughed so softly that no-one could hear it." "Listen, then," said he, and when I replied that I could hear nothing, he said triumphantly, "Of course you can't — that was me laughing like Pathfinder — I always do it that way now." And so we swore friendship because we liked each other's cut, and any time we fell out after that was if I laughed like Pathfinder.'

Sir James Barrie shared that delightful reminiscence with an audience in his school-town many years later, but it really belongs to the novel of boyhood which he entitled *Sentimental Tommy*. . . . To his new friend, when he came to know

him better and trusted him, he confided privily what the world learnt for the first time (with particulars) half a century afterwards, that while he attended the Academy he wrote his first novel. This must be the novel to which vague reference is made in the autobiographical pages of *Margaret Ogilvy*; we gather that it was a three-volume work, and that he actually submitted it to a publisher who, in acknowledging it, said that he regarded its author as a clever lady, a mistake which nettled the youthful aspirant so much that he wrote back to say he was a gentleman. In a speech which Barrie delivered at his old school he divulged an important detail about this novel. 'It was a very cynical thing, entitled *A Child of Nature* – she was not really that kind. It was a tale of Dumfries. A long thing, one hundred thousand words. A year ago I came upon the manuscript, and, you will be relieved to hear, gently tore it up, just in case it should fall into the wrong hands, you know. My friend liked the story, and was always begging me to read the new chapter to him, especially if it was a love chapter. I got the best of my love-scenes out of the novels by sparkling lady-authors which I read with my eyes starting out of my head in Mr. Anderson's library.'

But J. M. Barrie's reading was not restricted to Fenimore Cooper and the fiction-favourites of the minute. He has not failed to acknowledge a spiritual debt to the poetry of Robert Burns. He has spoken with peculiar tenderness about the poet himself, concerning whom and Carlyle he

thought he was the discoverer of an interesting fact while he was at school — ‘they had made love, though at different times, across the same stile.’ And he has written: ‘One half of Burns we can all fathom, for he was so Scotch that he was and is our blood relation, the one who lived more vividly than the rest. . . . All the miseries of him, his misdeeds, his follies, we understand as we know some loved and erring son with whom we have sat up all night in the fields.’ Later on, this love of an illustrious countryman whom he never saw was to be transferred in part to another illustrious countryman, one whom he was ordained never to meet either, though he knew him well. ‘Vailima was the one spot on earth I had any great craving to visit,’ he wrote in *Margaret Ogilvy*. He had been invited there by Stevenson himself, whose directions were: ‘You take the boat at San Francisco and then my place is the second to the left.’ But Stevenson’s death in 1894 put an end for ever to his ‘scheme of travel.’ ‘I shall never go up the Road of Loving Hearts now, on “a wonderful clear night of stars,” to meet the man coming toward me on a horse. It is still a wonderful clear night of stars, but the road is empty. So I never saw the dear king of us all. But before he had written books he was in my part of the country with a fishing-wand in his hand, and I like to think that I was the boy who met him that day by Queen Margaret’s burn, where the rowans are, and busked a fly for him, and stood watching, while his lithe figure rose and



fell as he cast and hinted back from the crystal waters of Noran-side.'

The passing of 'R.L.S.' affected Barrie in what, for him, was a rather unusual way, for he composed an elegy entitled 'Scotland's Lament,' which is a poem in the strict technical sense, although he had previously given little indication that he practised the craft of rhyme and metre, except in the instance of one or two newspaper parodies done in the early 'eighties, a set of verses entitled 'John Nicol,' which appeared in *Good Words* for April, 1891, and the libretto of a 'comic opera' that he and Sir Arthur (then Mr.) Conan Doyle wrote in collaboration about the year of 'John Nicol.'

'Scotland's Lament' was primarily intended for the consolation of those of his fellow-countrymen whom Stevenson himself called the 'Scotty Scots.' While the poem was printed in the *English Bookman* during the year 1895 (Clement Shorter reprinted it in March, 1918, as a booklet of twenty-five copies only, prefaced by a quotation from the letter announcing the news of Stevenson's death which Barrie received from Mr. Lloyd Osbourne on January 6th, 1895) only seven of the seventeen stanzas conceded anything in a philological way to the Sassenach. Here are examples:—

'Now out the lights went stime by stime,  
The towns crept closer round the Kirk,  
Now all the firths were smored in rime,  
Lost winds went wailing through the mirk.

‘A star that shot across the night  
Struck fire on Pala’s mourning head,  
And left for aye a steadfast light  
By which the mother guards her dead.’

Scotland is represented as a mother grieving for the loss of her brilliant and humane son:—

‘Her breast is old, it will not rise,  
Her tearless sobs in anguish choke.  
God put His finger on her eyes,  
And then it was her tears that spoke. . . .

‘“The lad was mine!” Erect she stands,  
No more by vain regrets oppress’t,  
Once more her eyes are clear, her hands  
Are proudly crossed upon her breast.’

Incidentally, and as a point of interest, it may be noted that the author of ‘Scotland’s Lament’ is not the first James Barrie who wrote verses. James Barrie of Bemersyde, born at Bothwell in Spot, East Lothian, in 1753, was a predecessor long since forgotten, although several volumes of his simple lays are in existence. The last of them is dated 1824, a crude production ill-printed at Kelso (mis-spelt Kleso on its title-page), and priced one shilling, in which the verse is preceded by an autobiography from which we learn that the poet’s father was a meal-dealer and his grandfather a shepherd. The autobiography, garrulous and pathetic, is justified in a verse printed under the book’s title:—

'A book that hath the Author's life,  
I love to read the same;  
As I wish neighbour's do to me,  
I do the same to them.  
This golden rule most excellent,  
Stands fair and never varrie,  
You may believe it is as true  
As my name is James Barrie.'

James Barrie, who had become a permanent invalid and died soon after the issue of these 'Poems,' refers familiarly in his prose to one 'Robin Burn.'

### III

The sly endeavours which Barrie made at home to infect his mother with an enthusiasm for Robert Louis Stevenson similar to his own are described in a mood of tearful absurdity in *Margaret Ogilvy*, and better perhaps than any other chapter of a self-revealing book (that shall be dealt with in its chronological season) does the description show how complete was the attachment between son and mother.

'In the novels we have a way of writing of our heroine, "she drew herself up haughtily," and when mine draw themselves up haughtily I see my mother thinking of Robert Louis Stevenson.' Mrs. Barrie, whose maiden name was Margaret Ogilvy, sternly refused to read *The Master of Ballantrae*, despite her son's malicious persistency

in putting the book in her way. For, according to Barrie, Stevenson had committed an unpardonable crime in her eyes: 'he wrote better books than mine.' She would find it on her table, 'so that it said good-morning to her when she rose'; or popped up invitingly open against her teapot; or on top of the clothes-basket with her spectacles for bookmark. Eventually, if she thought nobody was observing her, she took surreptitious doses of it, and when her son appeared 'there was no book to be seen, only an apron on her lap and she was gazing out of the window.' Then followed a ruthless cross-examination of the dogged old lady:—

'You have been sitting very quietly, mother.'

'I always sit quietly. I never do anything. I'm just a finished stocking.'

'Have you been reading?'

'Do I ever read at this time of day?'

'What is that in your lap?'

'Just my apron.'

'Is that a book beneath the apron?'

'It might be a book.'

'Let me see.'

'Go away with you to your work.'

But the cross-examiner, who appears again in *The Little Minister* as the Reverend Mr. Dishart, firmly questioning his mother, also named Margaret, about her supper in their frugal lodging, insisted on lifting the apron. And on her lap, of course, he found *The Master of Ballantrae*. When he had made a shocked exclamation

and she had shown suitable surprise, and he had looked sternly at her and she had blushed, he asked what she thought of the book. 'Not nearly equal to mine?' And she answered determinedly, 'Nothing like them.'

In the period of her fading antagonism that followed she was wholly conquered by *Treasure Island*, although at first 'she would not thole pirate stories.' 'I remember how she read *Treasure Island*, holding it close to the ribs of the fire (because she could not spare a moment to rise and light the gas), and how, when bedtime came, and we coaxed, remonstrated, scolded, she said quite fiercely, clinging to the book, "I dinna lay my head on a pillow this night till I see how that laddie got out of the barrel."'

Old Mrs. Barrie's declining years appear to have been mainly spent in resisting with all her stubborn humoursome heart the unwelcome belief of of the outer world that there were other authors of merit as well as her son. . . . There is no need to speak of that son's devotion to Margaret Ogilvy, as he called her — his use of her maiden-surname has the warranty of an old Scots custom. He has done a full-length portrait and several studies and sketches of her that are now in the possession of the world, to be held, as a paraphrase of the customary clause in the trust-deeds of a nation's picture galleries might declare, by the world and its heirs for ever. They are sufficient. In one of the prefaces to his novels and sketches that have yet been seen by only a few

people, he avows that 'the love of mother and son has written everything of mine that is of any worth,' and that all his first books came into existence to please 'one woman who is now dead.' Relatively scarce are Barrie's references to his father. But he does not fail to speak in several books very kindly of 'one who proved a most loving as he was always a well-loved husband, a man I am very proud to be able to call my father.' Beyond this, however, we are told nothing of Barrie's relation to him as a son, unless we care to turn to *A Window in Thrums* and discern that father in Hendry, the husband of Jess Mc Qumpha. 'I do not know,' writes Barrie, 'that I have been able to show in the most imperfect way what kind of man Hendry was. He was dense in many things, and the cleverness that was Jess's had been denied him. He had less book-learning than most of those with whom he passed his days, and he had little skill in talk. I have not known a man more easily taken in by persons whose speech had two faces. But a more simple, modest, upright man there never was in Thrums, and I shall always revere his memory.'

## IV

The son of Margaret Ogilvy did not leave his boyhood behind him when he left Dumfries Academy for Edinburgh University. Life became at once a more difficult thing for him, for whereas he had the advantage of a kinsman's

close proximity at Dumfries — his elder brother was an inspector of schools in the town — when he arrived in Edinburgh he was unceremoniously taken in hand by no less than seven rigid persons called professors. Of these, Blackie and Masson fondly supposed themselves to be adding to the young man's knowledge of Greek and literature, while Tait and Calderwood had similar illusions in the matter of Natural Philosophy and Moral Philosophy, and Campbell-Fraser, Sellar and Chrystal did what they could with him on behalf of Logic and Metaphysics, the Humanities and Mathematics. Besides, a young man's poverty is felt more keenly when he is an undergraduate at a great university, and Barrie was poor. Not that he allowed himself to be affected by the circumstance; on the other hand, an article he contributed to *The Nottingham Journal* when he became a writer by profession suggests that he made the best of it: — 'I knew three undergraduates who lodged together in a dreary house at the top of a dreary street, two of whom used to study until two in the morning, while the third slept. When they shut up their books they woke Number 3, who arose, dressed, and studied till breakfast-time. Among the many advantages of this arrangement the chief was that, as they were dreadfully poor, one bed did for the three. Two of them occupied it at one time, and the third at another. Terrible position? Frightful destitution? Not a bit of it. The Millennium was in those days. If life was at the top of a hundred steps, if students

occasionally died of hunger and hard work combined, if the midnight oil only burned to show a ghastly face, "weary and worn," if lodgings were cheap and dirty, and dinners few and far between, life was still real and earnest, in many cases it did not turn out an empty dream.'

As a matter of fact, the quality of grave elvishness, that was later to outweigh all his other characteristics and swing him out of the world of mortals into a fairy-land of his own discovery, yet the same that Plato dreamed of: the elvishness which we have observed peeping out among his wistful Dumfries memories, appears to have lain fallow for a while during his undergraduate period, thus allowing opportunity for the full exercise of a pawky mischievousness and gentle satire, perfectly blended even at that early time, and thereafter to prove his artistic salvation on more than one occasion before he found the true outlet, that of fantasy and satire in unity, for his moods of wisftulness and self-oppression. It would be difficult to classify this combination, because if it is humour the vein was surely never exploited until Barrie came. English wit, American quaintness, Scottish drollery — each is a familiar thing to us, broad and hearty, crisp and dry, or moist-earthy and tender. But how shall we describe the prod, or rat-a-tat, which gives such a crackling start to one of several early books that are quasi-autobiographical, *An Edinburgh Eleven?* — 'The first time I ever saw Lord Rosebery was in Edinburgh when I was a student, and I flung a clod of earth



at him. He was a peer: those were my politics.' There is also, late in the same volume, a chuckling recollection of Professor Masson's lecture on Chatterton, during which the Professor remarked, with a slight hesitation, that had the luckless poet mixed a little more in company and – and smoked, his morbidness would not have worked such havoc in his career. 'That turned my thoughts to smoking,' comments his student, 'because I meant to be a Chatterton, but greater. Since then the Professor has warned me against smoking too much. . . .'

It is a new humour that began and, being as much a part of him as his bodily movements and personal habits, will end with Barrie. When he sets it playing around the memories of his classmates it gains in uproariousness but loses none of its unique colouring. We are led through some of the chapters in *An Edinburgh Eleven* with an irresistibility that impelled the late Dixon Scott to declare that 'when Barrie wrote Tommy-rot he was great.' The studies which, for no exclusive reason – they were, in a sense, tit-for-tat – are headed by the names of his professors, read almost too delightfully not to be true. Indeed the wise reader will accept them unreservedly. Consider the passage in which he recalls how there belonged to Sellar's class a very little fellow who was always a puzzle to the principal because 'he was higher sitting than standing: when the Professor asked him to stand up, he stood down.' Or the portrait of a boy in Calderwood's class, aged sixteen or so,

with a squeaky voice and a stammer, who sat on the back bench and seemed always to be wanting to know something about the infinite. 'Every discussion day he took advantage of a lull in the debate to squeak out, "With regard to the infinite—" and he could never get any further. No one ever discovered what he wanted enlightenment on about the infinite. He grew despondent as the session wore on, but courageously stuck to his point. Probably he is a soured man now.'

The inevitable debating society is one of the features of his 'Varsity life that Barrie has not failed to speak of—and make fun about. 'We were the smallest society in the University and the longest-winded, and I was once nearly expelled for not paying my subscription.' One of his fellow-members is remembered as Gregory. 'What,' he sighs, 'has become of Gregory? He was one of those men who professors say have a brilliant future before them, and who have not since been heard of.' Another member was Morton, 'of a different stamp. He led in the debate on Beauty of the Mind *v.* Beauty of the Body. His contempt for the beauty that is only skin-deep is not to be forgotten. How noble were his rhapsodies on the beauty of the mind! And when he went to a supper party at the house of our Professor of Moral Philosophy, how quick he was to pick out the prettiest girl, who took only ten per cent. in moral philosophy, and to sit beside her all the evening.'

An extract from the journalistic writings of a

few years afterwards may be introduced here to illustrate Barrie's schoolboyish ability to make fun of an object and then turn it upside down and make more fun. 'I remember being invited,' he writes, 'with a batch of other undergraduates, once to assist at a banquet given by a college professor to his private lady students. When I know that I am expected to talk to young ladies I prepare some half-dozen suitable remarks to fire off at intervals, and I was on the point of commencing number one, which was no doubt of a frivolous nature, to the genius who was placed by my side, when she raised her saucer eyes and asked me eagerly if I did not think that Berkeley's Immaterialism was founded on an ontological misconception. I contrived to whisper that such had always been my secret impression, then quietly fainted, and was sent home to be bled.'

Professor Calderwood, we are informed, was an expert in abstract thinking. Also he considered that there is 'a great deal of moral philosophy in "The Dead March in Saul,"' and once he said as much to his class, becoming so enthusiastic about it that he rashly asserted he could excuse the absence of a student who had been away hearing 'The Dead March in Saul.' He paid heavily for his enthusiasm, however, many letters coming to him from students, of which Barrie recalls examples. Thus: 'Mr. McNaughton (Bench 7) presents his compliments to Professor Calderwood, and begs to state that his absence from the class

yesterday was owing to his being elsewhere, hearing "The Dead March in Saul." Another student regretted his absence from a lecture, but hoped his Professor would overlook it, as he was 'unavoidably detained at home, practising "The Dead March in Saul."' And a third student wrote to say that as he was coming to the class he heard 'The Dead March in Saul' being played in the street. His non-attendance at the lecture was due to his being too much affected. 'It is indeed a grand march. - Yours faithfully, JOHN ROBBIE.'

To Professor Campbell-Fraser must be given the credit of having been the first to make a deeper appeal to Barrie's comic genius, for although it was not until long afterwards that his reflections were written on Campbell-Fraser's metaphysics class he must have subconsciously appreciated the laughable aspects of it at the time he was one of the professor's students. He describes him as 'rather a hazardous cure for weak intellects,' and his satirical portrait may stand to-day as deadly criticism of some aspects of modern thought. 'Young men whose anchor had been certainty of themselves went into his class floating buoyantly on the sea of facts, and came out all adrift - on the sea of theory - in an open boat - rudderless - one oar - the boat scuttled. How could they think there was any chance for them when the Professor was not sure of himself?

'I see him rising in a daze from his chair and putting his hands through his hair. "Do I exist?"

he said thoughtfully, "strictly so-called?" The students (if it was the beginning of the session) looked a little startled. This was a matter that had not previously disturbed them. Still, if the Professor was in doubt, there must be something in it. He began to argue it out, and an uncomfortable silence held the room in awe. If he did not exist, the chances were that they did not exist either. It was thus a personal question. The Professor glanced round slowly for an illustration. "Am I a table?" A pained look travelled over the class. Was it just possible that they were all tables? . . . .'

And we are asked to believe that in the privacy of their rooms those students would humbly pinch themselves to see if they were still there. Barrie has claimed jocosely that he himself, while a student, proved in half an hour to another student that he, the student, did not exist. 'He got quite frightened, and I can still see his white face as he sat staring at me in the gloaming. This,' drily adds Barrie, 'shows what metaphysics can do.'

In a reminiscence charged with poignancy he has said that he never hears of that old University now, nor re-visits it, 'passing under the shadow of the walls one loves when one has done with them,' without seeing himself as he was the day he matriculated, 'an awestruck boy, passing and repassing the gates, frightened to venture inside, breathing heavily at sight of janitors, Scott and Carlyle in the air.' Immediately after writing that sentence he recovers his sense of fun, and speaks

of a class-room so little sought for that legend tells that its door once showed the notice: 'There will be no class to-day as the student is unwell.'

## v

Long before James Barrie went down from Edinburgh University, where he acquired sufficient in the way of learning to gain for himself the degree of Master of Arts, he had made up his mind about the future. 'There could be no hum-dreadful-drum profession for me: literature was my game.' He encountered on his own doorstep the antipathy and verbal discouragement against which nearly every literary beginner requires to steel himself. There were, for example, two maiden ladies, to whom he made the defiant answer, 'An author,' when they asked him what he intended to be. Whereupon they flung up their hands and exclaimed reproachfully: 'And you an M.A.!'

Thus he returned home to Kirriemuir, a young and earnest man, equipped in his very individual way for a career which he embarked upon with his own good resolutions and, of course, his mother's sympathy, that welled up from an ardent mind, albeit she had originally desired him to qualify for the ministry—'In those days,' it is recorded in *The Little Minister*, 'the first question asked of a child was not "Tell me your name," but "What are you to be?" and one child in every family replied "A minister."' The house at

which he began his free-lance journalism stood on the Brechin road, an ordinary suburban villa, the last of a row, with an insignificant front garden. Directly opposite is a cottage that his imagination lingered on very fruitfully indeed. To this 'cot that watched the brae,' and not to Barrie's home, our first thought is given as we set foot in his native place. That it should be so is natural; for Barrie was to write of it always in detail and with an intimacy which has deceived many strangers into the assumption that he once lived there himself, although he never set foot inside it.

'On the bump of green round which the brae twists, at the top of the brae, and within cry of T'nowhead Farm, still stands a one-storey house, whose white-washed walls, streaked with the discolouration that rain leaves, look yellow when the snow comes. In the old days the stiff ascent left Thrums behind, and where is now the making of a suburb was only a poor row of dwellings and a manse, with Hendry's cot to watch the brae. The house stood bare, without a shrub, in a garden whose paling did not go all the way round, the potato pit being only kept out of the road, that here sets off southward, by a broken dyke of stones and earth. On each side of the slate-coloured door was a window of knotted glass. Ropes were flung over the thatch to keep the roof on in wind.'

It is in this humble home—the thatch of the roof has been replaced by stone—that provides the setting of *A Window in Thrums*. For twenty

years or more Jess McQumphra looked out upon the world from it 'as through a telescope,' and Barrie framed his own mother's face in the window; for while 'there never was any Jess, anything in her that was rare and beautiful she had from my mother; the imaginary woman came to me as I looked into the eyes of the real one.' In the same imaginative way he transplanted other members of the Barrie family to the cottage, Leebie of the book being obviously founded on the sister who figures so heroically in *Margaret Ogilvy*, and there is reference to a small brother, his mother's first-born, 'the bit of her that was dead.' Hidden from Jess's view, just over the hill, is 'Thrums,' or 'Kirriemuir,' with its square of which Robert Louis Stevenson had a distinct recollection when he wrote to Barrie; 'an irregular open place or square, in which I always see your characters evolve.' A haphazard group of little houses 'squeezed round that square,' went on Stevenson, 'like chickens clustering round a hen.' The first of our many glimpses of Kirriemuir in Barrie's writings (for he has been an uncommonly stay-at-home author) belongs to winter, when it is but 'two church steeples and a dozen red stone patches standing out of a snow-heap.'

We must imagine James Matthew Barrie, therefore, beginning to play himself in at the game of literature in a house that belonged to an old-fashioned, kindly homespun market-town — a local writer has called it beautiful, but there is much to



be said for the contention that a plain woman or an ugly man first declared that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Kirriemuir is ninety miles from Edinburgh by railway, fifty miles as the crow flies; four hundred and eighty-two from London if the distance be measured as the railway people measure it, or four hundred if we follow the track of the same bird's black wings. Sir Walter Scott's pen had been laid down exactly half a century, while the name of Robert Louis Stevenson was then being exalted for its glamorous association with a recently-published romance of adventure which, entitled *Treasure Island*, had taken the western world by storm: with a collection of fantastic stories, *New Arabian Nights*, and some travel studies; and two books of essays in which is offered something very like an original philosophy of life.

And — who knows? — by some mysterious divination or telepathy Barrie may possibly have been aware of and influenced for ever after by certain words which Stevenson was at that precise period inditing to his friend Mr. Dick, who for many years had been head-clerk and confidential assistant in the family firm at Edinburgh: — 'I re-read the other day that heartbreaking book, the *Life of Scott*. One should read such works now and then, but O not often. As I live, I feel more and more that literature should be cheerful and brave-spirited, even if it cannot be made beautiful and pious and heroic. We wish it to be a green place. . . .'

## VI

Barrie has recalled that he started as all young writers start, by 'wooing literature with contributions that were all misfits.' In an old, faded book long afterwards he found voluminous notes on works that he planned to write at some future date, nearly all of these intended works being 'essays on deeply uninteresting subjects.' A volume on the older satirists, from Skelton and Tom Nash onward, was actually commenced — 'the half of that manuscript still lies in a dusty chest' — and there were many ideas and suggestions for papers on Mary Queen of Scots, who was also appropriated as the heroine of a projected story. He has felt that Queen Mary seems to have been luring him to his undoing ever since he saw Holyrood, 'and I have a horrid fear that I may write that novel yet.'

It was not long before the aspiring journalist turned his thoughts to London. His mother (who 'drained all available libraries for books about those who go to London to live by the pen, and they all tell the same shuddering tale') was resolute in her discouragement until by a gradual process he had been able to persuade her that the metropolis was not quite 'a monster that licked up country youths as they stepped from the train.' The process consisted of taking her on imaginary jaunts through London by the aid of a map which he drew specially, and more accurately than he could draw it after he had seen

the city. If this map ever existed and has been preserved it is surely one of the most important of the Barrie relics; for, had he not been able to think of the idea we might never have had Peter Pan's famous map of Kensington Gardens.

Barrie's own description of the jaunt, in the reminiscent pages of *Margaret Ogilvy*, is very entertaining. Gleefully the two of them would call at an imaginary telegraph-office, 'to wire my father and sister that we should not be home till late'; they winked to his books in shop-windows (so confident were they of his ultimate fame that in their fancy he had written quite a number of volumes already); they lunched at restaurants, taking great care not to call it dinner; they greeted Mr. Alfred Tennyson with a familiar 'How do?' as they passed him in Regent Street: and, finally, they called at the publishers' offices for a cheque and went straight to a shop where one may buy a sealskin coat for 'a middling old lady.'

## VII

A day came when Barrie's sister saw an advertisement in an English provincial paper for a leader-writer, and before many hours had elapsed he proved to be the successful applicant. At a salary which seemed to Kirriemuir folk 'prodigious,' but which Mr. J. A. Hammerton has authoritatively stated to be only three guineas a week, Barrie joined the staff of the *Nottingham Journal* in February, 1883.

In his novel of journalistic life, *When a Man's Single*, this newspaper is disguised as the *Silchester Mirror*, one of two daily newspapers published in Silchester, each of which has the 'largest circulation in the district, and is therefore much the better advertising medium.' Barrie's first experiences in journalism are satirically recounted in this novel, but, as Mr. St. John Adcock has noted, the facts are so cunningly blent with fiction that the student desiring illumination of the author's personal career cannot always be sure that the apparent sunlight is more than a mere reflection. We may at least recognise, however, the original of Rob Angus:—

"He's a Yorkshireman, I believe," continued the crafty Protheroe.

"That's all you know," said the foreman, first glancing back to see if Mr. Licquorish's door was shut. "Mr. George Frederick has told me all about him. He's a Scotsman called Angus, that's never been out of his native country. . . ."

"Oh, Mr. George Frederick has heard a great deal about him," continued Penny maliciously, "and expects him to do wonders. He's a self-made man. . . . Mr. George Frederick offered him a berth here before Bill Tagg was engaged, but he couldn't come."

"I suppose," said Juvenal, with the sarcasm that made him terrible on Fridays, "the *Times* offered him something better, or was it the *Spectator* that wanted an editor?"

Barrie's education as a newspaper man was

swift and, from the standpoint of literary idealism, more or less devastating. Soon he had learnt all that is to be known about the editorial management of what, safely disguised as the object of his contempt was in his novel, he did not hesitate to describe as a third-rate newspaper; 'the capacity for wonder had gone out of him,' and the art of the leader-writer became little else than writing 'readably, authoritatively, and always in three paragraphs on a subject he knows nothing about.'

The shaft in this sarcastic quasi-remembrance is aimed at his own work on the *Nottingham Journal*. He is not very fair, though, to the accomplishment which was credited to that younger self. In addition to the daily leader which he began immediately he arrived in Nottingham and which sometimes measured two or three editorial columns, he contributed a 'special' every Monday, signed 'Hippomenes,' and a column of notes every Thursday accompanied by the same signature and under a general heading 'The Modern Peripatetic'; and anyone who takes the trouble to search the faded files of the *Nottingham Journal* and study this 'ready-writing' after forty years will observe how successfully it has retained its individual freshness and charm. His range of topics even extended on special occasions to politics; and when he dealt with the 'St. Mary's Ward Conservative Association Dinner' of Tuesday, April 17th, 1883 (the particulars are all in the title) he felt that nothing less than verse was adequate. So he wrote a 'memorial' skit of sixteen

six-line stanzas on the dinner and particularly the after-dinner speeches, parodying 'It was a Famous Victory.'

Something else is to be observed in that early journalism at Nottingham. Barrie's articles appear to have been written on any theme he cared to select (actually, within a single month, his titles were 'Male Nursery Maids,' 'The Maid Re-made' 'Rational Dress Association,' 'The Leafy Month,' 'Printers' Errors,' and 'Private Theatricals'), and the occasions on which he turned to the theatre for his material are frequent enough to be impressive. 'The Complete Playgoer: A Study in Tinsel'; 'Lear's Fool'; 'Stage Tricks'; 'An Old Morality Play'; 'Principal Boys' — such are among his titles, taken at random. From the very commencement of his intellectual life he appears to have been attracted by the playhouse, in which he was to prove a most brightly shining star, an extra stimulus, perhaps, being the Puritan discouragement of the 'Auld Lichts' in whose atmosphere he passed much of his boyhood.

Barrie's liking for the theatre eventually strengthened into a surpassing love, so that it is not unfitting to emphasise its origins. They date back to his life at Kirriemuir, and in *Auld Licht Idylls* he describes the visits to the market-town of a travelling showman who, besides playing *The Mountain Maid* and *The Shepherd's Bride*, exhibited 'part of the tail of Balaam's ass, the helm of Noah's ark, and the tartan plaid in which Flora M'Donald wrapped Prince Charlie.' Fifty years

ago, we are told in another part of the same book, the Scottish countryside was overrun by itinerant showmen, who formed little colonies in severe weather and pitched their tents in a sheltered patch of ground, occasionally hiring an outhouse in the nearby town and giving performances therein. 'The colony hung together until it was starved out, when it trailed itself elsewhere.' One of the shows was 'Sam'l Mann's Tumbling Booth,' with acrobats, sword-swallowers, and jugglers. Another was Gubbins' 'A' the World in a Box', 'a halfpenny peepshow in which all the world was represented by Joseph and his Brethren (with pit and coat), the bombardment of Copenhagen, the Battle of the Nile, Daniel in the Den of Lions, and Mount Etna in eruption.' Also there were minor shows which could be viewed on payment, not necessarily of money, but of 'an old pair of boots, a collection of rags, or the like.'

'In the daytime the waggon and tents presented a dreary appearance, sunk in snow, the dogs shivering between the wheels, and but little other sign of life visible. When dusk came the lights were lit, and the drummer and fifer from the booth of tumblers were sent into the town to entice an audience. They marched quickly through the nipping, windy streets, and then returned with two or three score of men, women, and children plunging through the snow or mud at their heavy heels. It was Orpheus fallen from his high estate. What a mockery the glare of the lamps and the capers of the mountebanks were,

and how satisfied were we to enjoy it all without going inside.'

It is a curious thing, but true, comments Barrie, that the herd-boys and ploughmen and others were sometimes struck with the stage-fever. Not quite such a curious thing, one might add, when it is remembered that he, too, armoured against it though he was with all his greater potentialities and complexities, fell a victim of the same complaint and was never cured. Many years later, in an introduction to a new edition of Mr. Leonard Merrick's novel *Conrad in Quest of his Youth*, Barrie declared that 'Merrick's mission (if he has a mission) is to warn us against authorship and the tawdry glamour of the stage,' but he has never really believed in the tawdriness of that glamour, although he has viewed the theatre from every possible angle. Not only did he frequent the pit and gallery of any playhouse to which his footsteps were drawn in Edinburgh, and, afterwards, in London; he even haunted the stage-door, which, as he informs us in his best accent of sly exaggeration, has always possessed an irresistible allurements for him. He has confessed that he particularly enjoys gazing at the actors 'not when dressed for their parts but as they emerge by the stage-door. . . . The stage-door keeper is still to me the most romantic figure in any theatre, and I hope he is the best paid.'



## CHAPTER TWO

London by Way of Nottingham

★

I

NOTTINGHAM was Barrie's half-way house, as they say, between Kirriemuir and London. But the Midland town might easily have had to share the distinction with a north-western city, for while he was working on the *Journal* he applied for a sub-editorship of *The Liverpool Daily Post*. To choose between him and another candidate for the post was the duty of Sir Alexander Jeans, the famous editor of the *Daily Post*, and often afterwards Sir Alexander admitted that by preferring the other man he made the outstanding misjudgment of his newspaper career.

Thus, for more than a year, Barrie stayed in Nottingham, a solitary individual who is remembered by his colleagues as 'mooning about the castle' in his leisure time, or sporting his oak at his lodging. Few of those *Journal* men are still living: but the memory of at least one of them, Richard Mann, has been affectionately preserved, and people who knew Mann on the Parliamentary staff of the Central News Agency, which he joined from Nottingham in later life, declare him to have been a character after Barrie's own heart. Nobody ever addressed him, after a few days' acquaintance, as other than 'Dicky,' the Agency's Parliamentary Chief at the present time has recalled; and although he was a man of brilliant attainments 'his sole ambition in life seemed to be the breeding of a bull-dog which would secure a blue

ribbon at the South London Bull-dog Show.' Bull-dogs were his inseparable companions. 'Indeed it was rumoured that he only set up house-keeping in order that his beloved dogs might have a suitable home and be well cared for.' 'Dicky' was an artist, and some of the 'weird and fearsome sketches on blotting paper,' made on a dull night in the House of Commons, have been carefully preserved: one of them, now framed, hangs there to this day. 'Dicky as an artist was a combination of Doré and Heath Robinson. Looking at his productions one might have been pardoned for wondering whether he had been mixing his drinks and seeing things.'

When Barrie sported his oak at his lodging in Nottingham he was secretly engaged in journalistic work of a kind which differed from that of writing leaders ('genuinely sorry for anybody he chanced to see reading them'); different because his ambitious purpose in that new work was not to give satisfaction of a provincial editor, but to gain a hearing for himself among editors in a far more important literary centre than Nottingham. He composed articles and sketches, and submitted them to likely journals in London.

Barrie's wit and whimsicality had good soil in these free-lance compositions. And yet when the sophisticated persons who occupied the editorial chairs of Fleet Street first encountered the fruits in black and white, they were not too suddenly enthusiastic. Maybe they suspected that the unknown aspirant was practising the gentle art

which Kirriemuir weavers characterised as 'drawing ma leg,' and no one familiar with his very original method of beginning a contribution will deny that there was ample ground for the suspicion. Here, as an example of Barrie's opening paragraphs at that time, is a quotation from an article on 'Shutting a Map':—

'Prominent among the curses of civilisation is the map that folds up "convenient for the pocket." There are men who can do almost everything except shut a map. It is calculated that the energy wasted yearly in denouncing these maps to their face would build the Eiffel Tower in thirteen weeks.'

And here is the beginning of an article on 'Mending the Clock':—

'It is a little American clock, which I got as a present about two years ago. The donor told me it cost half-a-guinea, but on inquiry at the shop where it was bought (this is what I always do when I get a present), I learned that the real price was four-and-sixpence.'

Often the contribution was uproariously absurd from start to finish. In 'Rules of Carving' the rules are mock-solemnly tabulated and enlarged upon. The first is that 'it is not good to climb on the table.' Then 'carving should not be made a matter of brute force'; and 'it will not assist you to call the fowl names.' The fourth rule is: 'Don't boast when it is all over.'

For a long time Barrie's 'Tommy-rot' remained unappreciated. And, thinking perhaps that the

sketches and papers which were being rejected had not sufficient 'body' to them he cast about for a new and less frivolous way of storming the London editorial offices. He began to write descriptive articles on the places he knew well (or not so well), and sometimes they were five or six thousand words long. Among the contributions in this kind was one on 'Gretna Green Revisited,' which he submitted to the editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, and had the satisfaction of receiving a note of acceptance instead of the usual rejection.

## II

For reasons that are soon to be made plain, this successful article, printed in the issue of January, 1886, when Barrie was twenty-six years old, must be regarded as an epoch-marking performance in miniature and examined accordingly. Other contributors in the same issue of the *English Illustrated Magazine* were Wilkie Collins, Canon Ainger, H. D. Traill, and David Christie Murray — the previous number had contained a poem by 'George L. Moore' — and we are moved with peculiar emotion as we look back at Barrie's pages after forty years and observe his name printed as unostentatiously as a young beginner's usually is, at the close of the article. Indeed his contribution looks very much like a fill-up, as editors and their minions call an article that nobody thinks anything of anyhow. It was rele-

gated to the concluding pages of the issue, and is the only item which nobody troubled to have illustrated.

Nevertheless the 'J. M. Barrie' who signed this early contribution, a 'pot-boiling' piece which in the main is straightforwardly descriptive, was shown thereby to be already as resolute in his individualism instead of merely content to pursue an impersonal method, as all young writers must be if their authorship is to make its mark. After reading it we feel unable to believe that Barrie ever composed even a mere 'stick' of news in the ordinary columns of a daily newspaper without investing it with something of his own personality. Already the penchant for grotesque and fantastic drolleries, which half the world appreciated thereafter as 'Barrieisms,' is wilful and active in the most unexpected places, and this essay on Gretna is ample proof. His paragraphs, mundanely transcriptive in their essence, were richly lit by apparently casual 'asides,' and stray fragments of portraiture in which we recognise the Barrie-to-be, as here and there across the apparent monotony of greenness on an April fruit-tree we may discern the potential harvest of September. The drollery of Barrie is in the portrait of an old toll-house keeper, named Beattie, who would whisk the runaway lovers like a bundle of stolen goods into the toll-bar and accomplish his work so expeditiously that the pursuing father of the romantic maiden flung himself in at the door in time to be introduced to his son-in-law. Marrying

became the passion of Beattie's life, so that in his later days he never saw a man and a maid together without creeping up behind them and beginning the marriage service. The grotesqueness of Barrie's observation, relatively crude and far more obvious than it became later, is in the passage on Beattie's nephew, a landlord of the 'Queen's Head' at Springfield who, 'troubled with corns, passed much of his time with a knife in one hand and his big toe in another.'

That Barrie was already aware of the pitfalls of a nearly habitual mood of wistfulness and self-oppression is clear. The room in which the Gretna marriages were celebrated is 'the immortal room, where peers of the realm have mated with country wenches, and fine ladies have promised to obey their fathers' stable-boys, and two lord chancellors of England, with a hundred others have blossomed into husbands.' The quaint deftness with which he was able, when it served his purpose, to work all life into the pattern of his art, not active human life and passive scenery only, is exemplified with vividness by a passage that recalls Richard Doddridge Blackmore, whose *Lorna Doone* had recently been published and probably read by the young apprentice:—

'Yesterday the rooks dinned the air, and the parish of Gretna witnessed such a marrying and giving in marriage as might have flung it back fifty years. Elsewhere such a solemn cawing round the pulpit on the tree-tops would denote a court of justice, but in the vicinity of Springfield,

it may be presumed, the thoughts of the very rooks run on matrimony.'

When Barrie was composing the papers of which this 'Gretna Green Re-visited' is a typical specimen he showed a marked willingness to sit at the feet of other exemplars also, his own countryman, 'R.L.S.', especially. 'The couples who dashed across the border with foaming fathers at their coaches' wheels' is pure Stevenson: so is the closing paragraph of the essay:—

'There is no hope for Gretna. Springfield was and is the great glory of its inhabitants. Here ran the great wall of Adrian, the scene of many a tough fight in the days of stone weapons and skin-clad Picts. The Debatable Land, sung by Trouvere and Troubadour, is to-day but a sodden mass, in which no King Arthur strides fearfully away from the "grim lady" of the bogs; and moss-troopers, grim and gaunt and terrible, no longer whirl with lighted firebrands into England. With a thousand stars the placid moon lies long drawn out, and drowned at the bottom of the Solway, without a lovesick maid to shed a tear; the chariots that once rattled and flashed along the now silent road were turned into firewood decades ago, and the runaways, from a Prince of Capua to a beggar-maid, are rotten and forgotten.'

### III

'Gretna Green Re-visited' had a remarkable sequel. While Barrie was planning to repeat its

small success with articles of a similar nature, the thought occurred to him that in his next writing he might venture nearer home than the Scottish border. And suddenly there came, 'as unlooked for as a telegram,' the recognition that his native Kirriemuir had 'something quaint about it,' and therefore offered better material for his especial pen than any other theme or half-known outside places could possibly do; that is, if only the material it offered him could be used as his impulse dictated, and not as he imagined other people might wish him to use it. 'A boy who found that a knife had been put into his pocket in the night could not have been more surprised' than he was at the forthrightness of the path thus spread before his feet with such simplicity. 'It seems odd,' he has written in one of the introductions contributed to the collected edition of his books published in America in 1896, 'but I am not the first nor the fiftieth who has left Thrums at sunrise to seek the life-work that was all the time awaiting him at home.'

But he did not gather all in a moment the confidence necessary for him to make his individual and independent exploitation of 'Thrums' — the name which, after long consideration, he gave to his native town, and is delightfully appropriate, 'thrums' being the loose threads that catch up a thread broken in handloom weaving. When he sent off the first of the sketches, entitled 'An Auld Licht Community,' and had the satisfaction of seeing it printed on November 17th, 1884, in



the *St. James's Gazette* — the *English Illustrated* were naturally slower, being a monthly instead of a daily, in printing their acceptances — he feared that he had exhausted the subject. In response to the editorial request for more sketches of the kind, however, 'I sent him a marriage, and he took it, and then I tried him with a funeral, and he took it.' His mother racked her brains, 'by request,' for recollections that might be worked into articles; 'she told me everything, and so my memories of our little red town were coloured by her memories'; and only when at last he had to fall back on the resources of his own imagination did he summon sufficient creative energy to bring into clear portraiture the types which are represented by Sam'l Mealmaker, Pete Lunan, Tammas Haggart, and the rest of the 'Old Lights' who were to figure in volume after volume.

Barrie's new departure had delighted the discriminating editor of the *St. James's Gazette*. He was Frederick Greenwood, who is for ever to be remembered among English editors as one who exercised such personal influence, dignified and inspiring, in his control of his journal that he had already come to be spoken of as Greenwood of the *St. James's*, just as, fifty years after, despite the deterioration of editorship into an easily acquired and cheaply retained impersonal anonymity, men spoke of 'Massingham of the *Nation*, and 'Strachey of the *Spectator*,' or 'Garvin of the *Observer*,' and 'St. John Adcock of the *Bookman*.' Greenwood did not conceal from the young

chronicler of simple life in the Highlands his pleasure at the type of work he was now submitting. As a matter of fact, although previously he had not wholly turned his face from Barrie's other kind of writing, he began to regard the examples that were submitted to him with a far more critical eye. The stories and sketches done in the Scots vernacular were always accepted, and, thus encouraged, Barrie wrote to him and asked, 'Shall I come to London?' The editor's reply was 'No,' as Barrie has since recalled; 'so I went.'

## IV

Of course it was springtime madness, and the young man who arrived in London before he had completed his twenty-fifth year and with hardly any visible means of subsistence was quickly sobered. Greenwood's negative advice had been given partly as a result of his observation that the *St. James's Gazette* was the only journal in which the 'Auld Licht' studies were finding a home. What Barrie would have done without Greenwood's distinctive encouragement it is impossible to conjecture; his gratitude for all that the elder man was able to do at that time never lessened. And twenty years later, at the dinner given by Greenwood's friends to the 'Grand Old Man of Fleet Street' on April 8th, 1905, in the Trocadero Restaurant, London, he took the opportunity to give public expression to it. John Morley pre-

sided, and Barrie responded to the toast of the committee that had organised the tribute.

'However much the other members of the committee may love Mr. Greenwood,' said Barrie, 'I love him more, for he invented me. . . . I bought my first silk hat when I came to London solely to impress him. In his honour we now take off every hat we have, but it was those first silk hats that meant the most. Old and battered are they now, but even they rise again and salute Mr. Greenwood.'

Barrie appeared in Fleet Street during 1885, and for several years encountered more reverses than successes. He worked extraordinarily hard; articles, stories, novels, sketches, and parodies came from his pen prolifically — actually he also wrote political squibs and satires, which were sometimes taken seriously, a certain journal declaring about one of them that 'there is not an atom of fact in it.' To his better work, or what he rightly considered was his better work, he had practically the same response always. Even when an editor requested him to write an article the stipulation was: 'No dialect — the public will not read dialect.'

## V

But Fleet Street, for all the pitfalls it has been assumed to possess, is a place of noble sympathies and practical comradeship. Soon Frederick William Robinson, editor of *Home Chimes*, helped

Greenwood to cheer Barrie's despondent moments, and then Barrie formed an acquaintance with Alexander Riach, a Scotsman on the *Daily Telegraph*. Shortly afterward Riach departed to Edinburgh, having been appointed to the editorship of the *Evening Dispatch*. He did not forget the young and persevering fellow-countryman whom he left behind him. He invited him to contribute regularly to his new paper, and it was one of the 'specials' in the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* that attracted the attention of a third Scot, who was to prove himself another of Barrie's helpful editors and, moreover, one of his greatest friends.

This was the Rev. W. Robertson Nicoll. He had founded the *British Weekly* in November, 1886, and was making a remarkable success of what may be described as a religious organ with convictions about politics and literature as well as Nonconformity. For some time Nicoll had been in need of a contributor who could write 'in a lively way on Scottish ecclesiastical affairs,' and, chancing to be in Edinburgh during the early months of 1887 he read in the *Evening Dispatch* a burlesque account of the Inverness Assembly of the Free Churches, so brilliant that immediately he sought out its author, who, of course, was Barrie. The first article that Barrie wrote for Robertson Nicoll was entitled 'The Reverend Doctor Whyte, by an Outsider,' and it appeared in the *British Weekly* during July, 1887. There was little of the outsider about Barrie, though, for

Alexander Whyte was his rival for the honour of being Kirriemuir's most distinguished son, and nobody could have had better warranty for writing about him. The signature to the article was a discreet disguise: it was 'Gavin Ogilvy.'

Robertson Nicoll became immediately enthusiastic about Gavin Ogilvy's writings, not excluding those in dialect which had been contributed to the *St. James's Gazette* under his own name. The paper on Whyte was followed by contributions of an astonishing versatility, signed in every instance by Gavin Ogilvy, noteworthily a serial story entitled *When a Man's Single*, and the series of character studies which were intended ultimately to form a book with the title *An Edinburgh Eleven*. Also it was under the watchful observation of Robertson Nicoll that Barrie put together from the *St. James's Gazette*, *British Weekly*, and, as he has recalled, 'from a drawerful of rejected stories,' the book of *Auld Licht Idylls*.

But *Auld Licht Idylls* had as little success when he offered the complete manuscript to the publishers as the various parts experienced while they were going the rounds separately. Disappointment followed disappointment. 'I offered it to certain firms as a gift,' writes Barrie, 'but they would not have it even at that.'

## VI

The blindness of supposedly wide-eyed publishers caused Barrie's first book to go down to history

as another than *Auld Licht Idylls*. Thus the accident of circumstance has made wealthier by many guineas the fortunate possessor of a first edition copy of *Better Dead* than the collector who holds *Auld Licht Idylls*, a far superior work. Forty years after publication *Better Dead* is valued by those who deal in curious books at £42, although the author had no illusions about its literary merits. When the proposal was made to him in after years that the book should be reprinted in a collected edition of his prose writings, he is reported to have responded with a shake of the head and murmured, 'Better dead. . . .'

'Weighted with *An Edinburgh Eleven* it would rest very comfortably in a mill-dam.' But he permitted its republication, after all, probably because: 'I have a sentimental interest in *Better Dead*, for it was my first, published when I had small hope of getting anyone to accept the Scotch, and there was a week when I loved to carry it in my pocket, and did not think it a dead weight. Once I almost saw it find a purchaser. She was a pretty girl, and it lay on a bookstall, and she read some pages and smiled, and then retired, and came back and began another chapter. Several times she did this and I stood in the background trembling with hope and fear. At last she went away without the book, but I am still of opinion that, had it been just a little bit better, she would have bought it.' Barrie captured the pretty girl, though, and passed her on to Mr. Noble Simms in *When a Man's Single*. Her treatment of the

fictitious Simms's fictitious novel is precisely the same, even to the smile.

## VII

*Better Dead* was published in 1888 by Messrs. Swan Sonnenschein and Company, of Paternoster Square. It counted only sixteen thousand words in all, and was priced at a shilling in paper covers which bore a coloured drawing of a tall-hatted individual lurking at a street corner, knife in hand, as two luckless pedestrians approach him. The little work may be characterised as an extravaganza, or novelette, an elaboration of the witty journalism that had appeared in the *St. James' Gazette*. And yet it is unique in its way: it contains enough quips and comicalities to have supplied the whole career and made the fortune of almost any of our humorists of a later day.

The contents-list (which, incidentally, is not duplicated in the chapter-headings, as though on the principle that a good thing cannot be repeated) is in itself a rare piece of fooling. Each chapter is a question: — 'Engaged?' 'The S.D.W.S.P.?' 'The Great Social Question?' 'Woman's Rights?' 'Dynamiters?' 'A Celebrity at Home?' 'Experimenting?' 'A Lost Opportunity?' 'The Root of the Matter?' 'The Old Old Story?' Written in an uncommonly simple style (to match), every sentence forms a paragraph. The scene opens in the manse parlour at 'Wheens' — Barrie's name for Kirriemuir before he thought of 'Thrums.'

To make fun of W. H. Mallock's book, *Is Life Worth Living?* which was causing a big stir at the time among thoughtful folk, appears to have been the original purpose of *Better Dead*. It records the achievements of 'The Society for Doing Without Some People.' Here, incidentally, we have the first instance of what in Barrie's maturity became well-known as his predilection for christening people and things alike by a descriptive phrase, such as 'The Island that Likes to be Visited,' or 'The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up.' (Peter Pan, according to Solomon Caw, was also a 'Betwixt-and-Between'); and at the close of Act II of *Dear Brutus* Margaret Dearth is heard to cry 'out of the impalpable that is carrying her away,' 'Daddy, come back; I don't want to be a might-have-been.'

The method by which individuals are 'done without' in *Better Dead* is similar to that expounded by De Quincey in one of his best essays (*Murder as a Fine Art*); and the model on which the homicidal organisation was based is Stevenson's *Suicide Club*. The whole thing is farcical after a fashion that does not seem as old-fashioned as one feared it might be:

'Clarrie rose to go, when she heard her name. The lovelight was in her eyes, but Andrew did not open the door for her, for he was a Scotch graduate. Besides, she might one day be his wife.'

Before Andrew Riach, the hero of the story, sets out to make a fortune in London, he proposes to Clarrie in his own peculiar manner:



'Lovers' watches stand still. At last Andrew stooped and kissed her upturned face.

"'If a herring and a half,'" he said anxiously, "cost three half-pence, how many will you get for elevenpence?"

'Clarrie was mute.

'Andrew shuddered. He felt that he was making a mistake.'

Reaching London, Andrew Riach endeavoured to obtain a secretaryship. He called at Gladstone's house, but 'all his private secretaryships were already filled. Andrew was not greatly disappointed, though he was too polite to say so. In politics he was a granite-headed Radical; and on several questions, such as the Church and Free Education, the two men were hopelessly at variance.' Living persons were freely introduced into the book and named without disguise; Lord Randolph Churchill, Joseph Chamberlain, Henry Labouchere, W. T. Stead, W. H. Mallock, Mrs. Langtry, Mary Anderson. . . .

Unsuccessful in politics, Andrew tries journalism with no greater success. *The Standard* even returned him somebody else's manuscript, 'and seemed to think it would do as well.' Until he meets with the S.D.W.S.P. he is a flat failure everywhere, despite that 'genius was written on his brow. He may have written it himself, but it was there.' In the end all is happy. 'Domesticated and repentant, he has renounced the devil and all *her* works.'

*Better Dead* went into a second edition during

the year of its publication. It was well received, one critic declaring it to be 'very midsummer craziness.' He facetiously suggested that Barrie was not the author, but Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw in collaboration. Mr. Shaw had recently attracted or repelled the reading public by *Cashel Byron's Profession*, which was being serialised in *To-day* at the time of Barrie's arrival in London; and *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*, by Wilde, had been published during 1887 in a magazine.

## VIII

'And then,' Barrie has recalled, continuing the ante-natal history of *Auld Licht Idylls*, 'on a day came actually an offer for it from Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. For this, and for many another kindness, I had the editor of the *British Weekly* to thank.'

*Auld Licht Idylls* was published in April, 1888, a few months after *Better Dead*. The critics do not appear to have shared the misgivings of editors and publishers about its contents, for in nearly every instance their enthusiasm was unqualified. Many reviews, in fact, read more like psalms of thanksgiving for a literary newcomer of such fresh charm, nor could their writers resist turning prophet about him, and not only in his own country.

During October, 1888—that is, six months after the issue of *Auld Licht Idylls* and while

Barrie was dangerously near becoming the talk of the town — *When a Man's Single; a Tale of Literary Life* appeared in book form. And before the close of the year its publishers (Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton again), had sent to Gavin Ogilvy the proof-sheets of *An Edinburgh Eleven*, a collection of 'pencil portraits from College Life,' the bulk of them, like *When a Man's Single*, having appeared serially in *The British Weekly*.

Eighteen eighty-eight, for James Matthew Barrie, was the first of many wonderful years.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Early Books and Friendships

★

#### I

*Auld Licht Idylls* is commonly regarded as one of the worthiest and most representative examples of Barrie's early art, although we are reminded by the appearance of Frederick Greenwood's name in the dedication that it was too definitely a piecemeal product of the author's unrestful period to be wholly satisfactory. His development underwent remarkable changes while its haphazard chapters were being written, and he is revealed between its covers as an inexperienced observer and awkward craftsman as well as a writer of imagination and adequate technique. Moreover, it is a work in which the naïve, immature Barrie, there represented so self-revealingly, is father of the mature man who has worked magic more widely and for a longer period than any author since Charles Dickens.

Consider the opening chapter of *Auld Licht Idylls*. Apparently written later than much of the remainder, it pictures the schoolhouse and the surrounding country, snow-laden and 'stormstead,' with the sharp perfection of an etching. All of Barrie's best descriptive work, especially that which was done when he came to write plays and consequently his unique stage-directions, possesses this quality of stark, almost bare vividness. And when his description is not intended to evoke a mood, but to clarify it, he makes

admirable use of a slow, meditative tempo, as in the chapter's conclusion :

'Far up the glen, after it twists out of view, a manse and half a dozen thatched cottages that are there may still show a candle-light, and the crumbling gravestones keep cold vigil round the grey old kirk. Heavy shadows fade into the sky to the north. A flake trembles against the window: but it is too cold for much snow to-night. The shutter bars the outer world from the school-house.'

And now consider the five chapters, or 'idylls,' that follow, and, finally, the two headed 'Cree Queery and Mysy Drolly' and 'The Courting of T'nowhead's Bell.' Despite their glimpses of minister, old dominie, postmistress, and villagers, the five first-named are really an achievement in agile note-taking (second hand as well as first hand) and little else. The principal figures in the Presbyterian community whose perfervid members are called its 'Old Lights,' or 'Auld Lichts,' do not come to life as separate beings until Barrie, writing a sentence which is like a fine free gesture, as though he were at last swinging open the gate of his shy imagination, began a chapter about Cree Queery and Mysy Drolly with: 'The children used to fling stones at Griner Queery because he loved his mother.' It proves to be a story, placed there in isolation – an interpolation. But it is a triumphant one, for by the time he had finished with the old 'knife and scissor-grinder for three counties,' and the blind

woman who would have been in the poorhouse but for his self-sacrifice, Barrie is no longer in peril either of remaining an expert note-taker, or of becoming a puppet-master; he is already a creative artist. Technically he is thenceforward a short-story writer (as well as other things) in the strict sense of the classification.

## II

'The Courting of T'nowhead's Bell', which is the eighth *Idyll*, is even more definitely an interpolation than 'Cree Queery', and again a self-contained story in which are introduced a wholly new group of characters. The beginning has all a story-teller's cunning: 'For two years it had been notorious in the square that Sam'l Dickie was thinking of courting T'nowhead's Bell, and that if little Sanders Elshioner (which is the Thrums pronunciation of Alexander Alexander) went in for her he might prove a formidable one.' The dialogue, although too literal in spelling to allow Barrie to be considered as anywhere near the end of his apprenticeship in method, is nevertheless admirably that of an imaginative writer conscious of his power :

'“But am dootin' ye're a fell billy wi' the lasses.”

'“Ay, oh, I d'na kin, moderate, moderate” said Sam'l, in high delight.'

The climax, too, is substantial and compact. It is exactly what the story demands. T'now-

head's Bell was a farm-maid who had two lovers, as the opening sentence indicates with sufficiency. After much blowing hot and blowing cold the pair realise that she will accept the first who proposes to her, and one Sunday morning Sanders leaves the kirk during the service and makes off to T'nowhead's farm. His departure has not escaped Sam'l, however; 'with the true lover's instinct he understood it all.' Reduced to a state of sudden panic and desperation he too hurries out of his pew, despite his mother's frantic efforts to pull him back by his coat-tails and the congregation's scandalised faces.

Sanders has failed to anticipate his rival's challenge, and he keeps to the road in order that his newly-polished boots might be spared. Sam'l cunningly takes to the path over the burn, which is shorter, if steeper. The race is witnessed by those of the shocked worshippers whose pews are conveniently situated near the church windows. . . . Sanders is forestalled, and he accepts the situation philosophically until the opportunity comes to him to feed Sam'l's doubts lest he had acted too impetuously, which he does to such purpose that, in the end, Sam'l stands aside and allows Sanders to supplant him. 'And Bell?' the surprised minister asked when Sanders turns up at the manse instead of Sam'l. 'She's willin', too,' is the answer, 'she prefers 't.'

The comedy is delightful, and from the technical standpoint a remarkable advance on most of the earlier part of the book. But the most impressive

feature of 'The Courting of T'nowhead's Bell,' which, technically unsuitable for the *St. James's Gazette*, was rejected by every magazine, and 'only found shelter when it got within book-covers,' is the transformation which has overtaken Barrie's villagers during the brief time in which they began to exist. An 'Auld Licht' had been outstanding for his seasoned bleakness — 'In the session book of the Glen Quharity kirk can be read an old minute announcing that on a certain Sabbath there was no preaching because "the minister was away at the burning of a witch";' therefore, how else than bleak? . . . When he met a friend they said "Ay, Jeames" and "Ay, Davit," and then could think of nothing else.' His face was the index of his mind. It was 'dull and vacant, and wrinkled over a heavy wob.' The rest of his outward appearance is indicated in a superbly suggestive sentence. 'He wore tags of yarn round his trousers beneath the knee, that looked like ostentatious garters, and frequently his jacket of corduroy was put on beneath his waistcoat.' As we approach the last of the *Idylls* the figure becomes fantastic, the original creation of one whose inherent romanticism, now let loose in a stream of mingled fantasy and actualism, needed only the prompting of his realisation that Margaret Ogilvy's Kirriemuir reminiscences were no longer to be called upon, and that his art must begin to fend for itself. The late Dixon Scott, whose talent for critical discernment is brilliantly apparent in



an all-too-brief study of Barrie that leaves us lamenting more than ever the loss of a charmingly adventurous man of letters, sums up with admirable terseness the change, or rather the evolution. 'Tammass began to grow eldritch, Pete became a quaint gnome. Gnarled idiosyncrasies sprouted, the stolid features swelled or shrank, Thrums grew into a goblin market, all quirks and wynds and cobbles; its weavers were a race of hob-nailed elves.'

Equally noticeable is the author's increase of power in depicting action and incident. Two scenes in the book invite comparison especially. Each takes place in the kirk, and the first is to be found in the third chapter ('The Auld Licht Kirk'):

'One afternoon the kirk smelt of peppermints, and Mr. Dishart could rebuke no one, for the defaulter was not in sight. Whinny's cheek was working up and down in quiet enjoyment of its lozenge, when he started, noticing that the preaching had stopped. Then he heard a sepulchral voice say "Charles Webster!" Whinny's eyes turned to the pulpit, only part of which was visible to him, and to his horror they encountered the minister's head coming down the stairs. This took place after I had ceased to attend the Auld Licht kirk regularly; but I am told that as Whinny gave one wild scream the peppermint dropped from his mouth. The minister had got him by leaning over the pulpit door until, had he given himself only another inch, his feet would have

gone into the air. As for Whinny he became a God-fearing man.'

This appears to be the work of an author who is so eager to give details that he does not know what to leave out. Consequently it is far less intelligible than the sparer description of a kirk scene which is to be found in 'The Courting of T'nowhead's Bell,' at the moment when Sam'l Dickie resolves to follow his rival in deserting the congregation :

'The suspense was terrible. Sam'l and Sanders had both known all along that Bell would take the first of the two who asked her. Even those who thought her proud admitted that she was modest. Bitterly the weaver repented having waited so long. Now it was too late. In ten minutes Sanders would be at T'nowhead ; in an hour all would be over. Sam'l rose to his feet in a daze. His mother pulled him down by the coat-tail, and his father shook him, thinking he was walking in his sleep. He tottered past them, however, hurried up the aisle, which was so narrow that Dan'l Ross could only reach his seat by walking sideways, and was gone before the minister could do more than stop in the middle of a whirl and gape in horror after him.'

### III

After that the book goes plodding to its end with some further transcriptions of note-taking. And yet, taking it as a whole, Barrie was justified

in looking upon it and finding that it was good, as he must have done, or he would not have despatched a copy of it to Stevenson in far-away Samoa. Nevertheless, the public reception of *Auld Licht Idylls* was a mixed one, especially in Scotland. For while the *Aberdeen Free Press* was emphatic as the majority of English journals were in declaring that 'the little town with its kirks, looms, and men, stands out before us in almost startling reality,' and while the *Scottish Leader* ranked it as 'quite equal – to our thinking, superior – to anything in *Mansie Waugh*,' Kirriemuir itself does not appear to have been particularly pleased with Barrie's transcript. Mr Hammerton records that an old woman was asked what she thought of the book, and 'Perfect buff,' she replied; 'the work of an impident young smatchet.' 'Thrums does not catch fire so readily as London,' Mr. McLean is made to say in *Tommy and Grizel*. 'It was quite true,' observed the narrator. "'I was at the school wi' him," they said up there, and implied that this damned his book.'

By some mischance the package that Barrie mailed to 'R.L.S.' went astray. Nor is there any record that Stevenson received an author's copy of *When a Man's Single*, the remaining book of 1888. He may have read it all the same; and indeed, there is no early work by Barrie that gives anything like such justification for the famous expression of opinion that was sent privately from Samoa to Henry James: 'Barrie

is a beauty. . . . Stuff in that young man; but he must see and not be too funny. Genius in him, but there's a journalist at his elbow.'

## IV

'A tale of literary life,' is the description of *When a Man's Single* on its title-page, and it is inscribed 'to W. Robertson Nicoll.' But the recommendation half-consciously implied in these external trimmings cannot have deceived those who try to estimate a work independently of its writer, its theme, or its dedicatee, and who refuse to be dazzled into acceptance of it by the glamour it may carry – for by this time Barrie's name was as glamorous as any of the younger generation. Rarely in the history of tale-telling can a work have baffled and disappointed an expectant audience so completely. Already, in *Auld Licht Idylls* we have suspected that the mind of their author is at war with itself, and in *When a Man's Single* the struggle is suddenly brought to the surface – and to a temporary culmination – by the desertion of one of the protagonists who are both named Barrie. For two chapters the imaginative artist in him presents a convincing picture of homely Scottish life – at Thrums again – and now Rob Angus appears in a full-length portrayal, and once more a tale is peopled by Snecky Hobart, Tammag Haggart, and a group of weavers and farmers including McQuhatty of T'nowhead. Thus the stage is prepared for a

most powerful drama, and no hand could be more competent to write it than that which has been at work in the opening pages, where Rob Angus, the saw-miller and lonely bachelor who took his dead sister's little girl under his guardianship, is swept by sudden tragedy out of his peaceful life of reticent, bookish artisanship. The four-year-old Davy meets her death through an accident, and his grief is profound. 'He took his darling dead bairn in his arms and faced the others with cracking jaws. . . .'

And then, on the very next page, at the commencement of Chapter Three, the atmosphere and scene change entirely. The reader is dismayed, and his dismay deepens when the author indulges in a pun-maker's joke about a printer's 'devil' who was trying to light a fire at the newspaper office away in the English Midlands to which Rob has fled, and who complained that the editor and proprietor 'wouldn't give me any sticks' — 'sticks' in printer's slang meaning something very different to firewood. It becomes apparent that for good or ill the novelist's mood has changed, that the imaginative artist has deserted from a duty which could not have been palatable to him, and that the other Barrie has taken up the pen — the lesser Barrie, the M'Connachie, as he himself long afterwards christened 'the journalist at his elbow.' Admittedly, the story goes on to prove itself a triumph of whimsical wit, impishness and sentimentalism. For a time there is no sign of relation between

the Rob Angus to whom the first chapters introduce us, a dour, broad-shouldered fellow of twenty-six whose face was already rugged, 'and it was not the firs of the Whunny wood that were in his eye, but a roaring city and a saw-miller taking it by the throat,' and the Rob Angus who obligingly responds to the cynical conundrums of the facetious Mr. Noble Simms in the ninth chapter; the Rob Angus, moreover, on whom, in the eighteenth chapter, 'an awe fell,' so that he cried: 'What am I?' to the Colonel's daughter who had deigned to love him; and he would doubtless have gone on to pour contempt on himself as only a saw-miller's son had she not said, 'Don't, dear,' and 'put her hand in his.'

If it is difficult to adjust one's perceptions to the changed Rob Angus it is only possible to appreciate the frivolity of the journalistic scenes by tearing the pages of tragic prologue violently out of the book. From a standpoint of utter detachment we may, and with reason, speak of the comic perfection of the journalistic scenes—especially that of the satirical chapter about the Wigwam Club, which resembles the famous Savage Club in London, with which Barrie has associations. Otherwise the novel is a violation of all the rules.

The author of *When a Man's Single* has apologised for it. 'I expect that when I started Rob Angus I meant him to have a less strenuous time, but he fell in love, and once they fall in love there is no saying what your heroes will do.'

Moreover the story began to appear serially before more than two chapters were written. 'Soon I was only a chapter ahead. It is a method of publication I hope never to adopt again.' Apology needs to be supplemented by explanation, however. It is as if the author had paused in his writing, appalled by the sorrow and grimness of the life he was envisioning. His revulsion of feeling was drastic. One might almost say that his super-sensitive nerve failed him. Somehow he realised the incongruity of it all. Before the demands of the Colossus he had built up in thirty pages he fled and found refuge in relatively trivial witticisms and the portrayal of novelette types—for it is hard to believe that Colonel Abinger, Sir Clement Downton, and Mary Abinger are not borrowed from the juvenile work of fiction he confesses to having written while at Dumfries Academy!

Nevertheless, *When a Man's Single* is an important book in Barrie's list. It emphasises, more than anything he had yet written, that he was still to learn how to interpret in his own individual accent the eternal wisdom he had inherited. Heraclitus of old rendered that wisdom into wistful words about Life and Death being but one and the same thing, and, long afterward, Robert Louis Stevenson recapitulated it, defiantly and dogmatically in the pronouncement that 'The actual is not the true.' For Barrie felt rather than knew that life was not as he had portrayed it, that those who so envisioned it were spiritually

dead; yet somehow the dead could be restored to life, and the glory of life given back to them. But he was only groping towards his knowledge when he wrote *When a Man's Single*. 'Did his heart fail him,' he asked about 'R.L.S.,' at that very time, 'despite his jaunty bearing?' The question may well be applied in his own case: not yet aware of which way to lead the stricken Rob Angus, he lost him in a morass of relative futility. In the final chapter of the book the scene returns to Thrums, and the richness of the dialogue between the village cronies as they discuss Angus's accession to worldly fortune (of course he married 'happily ever after') of which they had received reports from afar, only serves to emphasise what artistic emptiness lies between the end of Chapter the Second and the beginning of Chapter the Nineteenth.

## v

*An Edinburgh Eleven* followed early in 1889. The book was published in cloth at eighteenpence and in paper at a shilling by the *British Weekly*, as the third of that journal's 'Extras,' one of the earlier two being *Books Which Have Influenced Me*, with contributions by Stevenson, Ruskin, Gladstone, Rider Haggard, P.G. Hamerton, and seven others. *An Edinburgh Eleven* is announced on its cover as by Gavin Ogilvy, but on the title-page appears Barrie's own name, with the addition, 'Author of *When a Man's*



*Single, Auld Licht Idylls*, etc.' An advertisement of the latter work among the end-pages intimates that it was already in a second edition.

*An Edinburgh Eleven* comprises eleven journalistic studies of men whose fame was not in every case restricted to the Scottish capital, for the team that included Barrie's mentors at the University was led by Lord Rosebery, and Stevenson was one of his followers. The note of fun-making is dominant, and as superbly irresistible as Barrie alone has known how to strike it; there is also a sober undertone perceptible here and there, not devoid of the suggestion of hero-worship. Professors Masson and John Stuart Blackie in particular were plainly men of his heart, and their portraits are brilliantly executed. 'A Gulliver in criticism,' the author calls Masson, and: 'Did you ever,' he writes about Blackie, 'watch him marching along Princes Street on a warm day, when every other person was broiling in the sun? His head is well thrown back, the staff, grasped in the middle, jerks back and forward like a weaver's shuttle, and the plaid flies in the breeze. Other people's clothes are hanging limp. Blackie carries his breeze with him.' In *Better Dead* a year earlier he had spoken irreverently of the professor as 'John Stuart Blackie, a man with a young head on old shoulders who had resigned his chair at Edinburgh and was now devoting his time to writing sonnets on himself in the Scotch newspapers.'

The critical study of Stevenson is pitched on a

different key to the rest of the volume. We are presented with the forerunner of many literary studies of his contemporaries that he was contributing at intervals to the monthly reviews, a carefully made piece of work that is remarkable for its discernment. 'Sauce,' the essayist's subject called it; the author of *The Master of Ballantrae* was then in his prime, and had done practically all his best work except *Weir of Hermiston*, but Barrie did not hesitate to write :

'He experiments too long; he is still a boy wondering what he is going to be. With Cowley's candour he tells us that he wants to write something by which he may be for ever known. His attempts in this direction have been in the nature of trying different ways, and he always starts off whistling. Having gone so far without losing himself he turns back to try another road. Does his heart fail him, despite his jaunty bearing, or is it because there is no hurry? . . . It is quite time the great work was begun. The sun sinks while the climber walks round his mountain, looking for the best way up.'

## VI

Another literary estimate of a contemporary which Barrie wrote during the late eighteenth-eighties was on George Meredith and his novels. He had continued his free-lance journalism on a wider scale and with more encouragement than he experienced before he began to be

known as an author of books (the turbulent and lovable William Ernest Henley, of the *Scots Observer* and *National Observer* proved one of his tardy conquests). The essay, it need hardly be said, had no place in *An Edinburgh Eleven*; it was never reprinted after appearing in the *Contemporary Review* for October, 1888. Neither, for that matter, was his essay on *Mr. Kipling's Stories*, (*Contemporary Review*, March 1891): the essay on *Thomas Hardy and His Novels*, printed in the same review in July, 1899, and which contained the declaration that: 'Among English novelists to-day Hardy is the only realist to be considered, so far as life in country parts is concerned'—Mr. Eden Phillpotts had not yet properly begun his magnificent series of Dartmoor novels: or, the essay on Baring-Gould's novels in the *Contemporary* of February, 1890—'Mehalah, by Mr. Baring-Gould is one of the most powerful romances of recent years.' Fortunately, however, some of his literary essays took the shape of prefaces to books, and have, therefore, remained within reach. The books are *A Widow's Tale*, by Mrs. Oliphant, (1898); *The Grandissimes*, by Boyd Cable (1898); *Coral Island*, by R. M. Ballantyne (1913); *The Voyages of Robert Falcon Scott* (1914); *Conrad in Quest of His Youth*, by Leonard Merrick (1918): and *The Young Visitors*, by Daisy Ashford (1919).

The essay on Meredith is the most important of them. Barrie was highly appreciative. 'Meredith has the largest vocabulary of any living man,'

is one of his claims, and his artistic sympathy with the series of novels which at that time was not yet completed—the publication of *One of Our Conquerors*, *Lord Ormont and His Aminta*, and *The Amazing Marriage* came between that of *The Little Minister* and *Sentimental Tommy*—was vividly revealed in the memorial essay which he wrote at Meredith's death. An important friendship between Barrie and Meredith, who was by thirty-two years the senior, began about the time of the *Contemporary* article, and lasted to the end of Meredith's life. 'Meredith discerned the genius of Barrie from the first,' wrote his son, Mr. W. M. Meredith, and letters from Box Hill to and about Barrie have been preserved in a published collection. 'I am comforted in seeing that work like yours is warmly greeted by press and public,' was one direct message: and another: 'Dear Mr. Barrie, Shall we hear that you are coming soon? You know that you are always welcome to me.'

But Meredith's regard for his young contemporary has its best verbal manifestation in a communication to Frederick Greenwood, who had asked him to support Barrie's candidature for membership of the Garrick Club, London. 'If there seems a doubt of Barrie's election, I will journey. But oh my work has hold of me, and a day lost is a dropping of blood. Would it be out of rule and blushless for me to write to the Committee? The election of Barrie honours the Club.'

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Thrums Window to Theatre Threshold

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I

A SECOND package went out to Samoa, the author's gift-offering on this occasion being *A Window in Thrums*. And although several years lay between the writing of the tribute by Meredith in his letter about Barrie to Frederick Greenwood and that of Stevenson's message direct to Barrie in response to *A Window in Thrums*, the two documents are surely enshrined together in the annals of literary friendship. Mr. Frank Swinnerton has doubted if Stevenson was very much interested in his friends: 'his own work and his own characters were the basis of the exchange of letters;' but it was Stevenson, for all that, who told Barrie frankly that he was 'the man for his money,' his (Barrie's) work being to him 'a source of living pleasure and heartfelt national pride. . . . There are two of us now that the Shirra might have patted on the head.' One of these two, the letter continued, was only 'a capable artist.' The other — meaning Barrie — looked like 'a man of genius.' And Stevenson concluded with the exhortation: 'Take care of yourself for my sake. It's a devilish hard thing for a man who writes so many novels as I do, that I should get so few to read. And I can read yours, and I love them.'

II

The book which had aroused Stevenson's en-

thusiasm was later than *Auld Licht Idylls* by a year and three months. It was published by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton in July, 1889, and, like its predecessor, was harvested from periodicals. But the circumstance is less readily betrayed; the book is more logical, the author's original intention being definite and not simply that of continuing the chronicles of Kirriemuir, as we might believe at certain points, such as the wholly irrelevant chapter on 'A Home for Geniuses.'

Again the reception in the outside world was a mixed one. Among those who devoted themselves to the noble art of praising were Mrs. Oliphant, who avowed in *Blackwood's Magazine* that 'no book could be more deeply instinct with the poetry of real feeling, in which no fiction is, though it requires something which can only be called genius to reveal it to the world;' Mr. Augustine Birrell, who wrote in *The Speaker* that 'what has happened so often before is happening now. Everybody is reading *A Window in Thrums* and *Auld Licht Idylls*. The instantaneous popularity of these two books is a beautiful thing. The author has conceded nothing to the public taste. May he never do so;' and Mr. (now Sir) Arthur Quiller-Couch, who spoke of Barrie as 'the most romantic of all my literary loves.' On the other hand there was the *Scotsman* newspaper, which dismissed the author of *A Window in Thrums* as 'a man who could make "copy" out of the bones of his grandmother.' ('My God!' groaned Dick Abinger in *When a*

*Man's Single*, 'I would write an article, I think, on my mother's coffin.') And Mr. R. B. Cunninghame-Graham wrote in accents of disdain that: 'If it pleases the Kail-yarders to represent half of the population of their native land as imbeciles the fault is theirs.' In this curt dismissal, which reminds us of Mr. G. K. Chesterton's denunciation of Mr. Hardy's most representative character as a brooding village idiot, Mr. Cunninghame-Graham was probably thinking less of Barrie than of the crop of imitations of *Auld Licht Idylls* and *A Window in Thrums*, ridiculed by W. E. Henley and others as the 'Kailyard School.'

*A Window in Thrums* has a clear title to be regarded as a novel, although the plot is tentative until half-way through the book, and its chapters are episodic, several of them 'essays that are more than essays,' as Sentimental Tommy would have called them: and only the last five of them growing naturally out of their forerunners. Again the looker-on narrates the story—almost invariably young novelists who commence their careers by telling the history of their own family or their immediate neighbours invent a first-person narrator. The dominie has come from the school-house some miles away to lodge at the one-storey cottage in which Hendry and Jess McQumpha dwell with their daughter Leeby: he is the tale-teller. The life within the cottage and without is described humorously and pathetically by turns, but there is little movement until the

arrival of Jamie, son of Hendry and Jess, from London. The first evidence that Jamie is not all he should be is given, apart from one or two hints couched in terms of sentimental foreboding, in the chapter entitled 'A Tale of a Glove.' At this point the author is confronted with a similar ordeal to that whose severity had proved disastrous in the case of *When a Man's Single*. But the time has not yet come for him to emerge triumphant; therefore, his heart fails him a second time, though he puts on no jaunty manner and thus avoids a repetition of the earlier disaster. Instead of finding refuge in flippancy, he turns (for the true way is still hidden from him) to what a critic who gained half his fame through his ability to fling a picturesque epithet calls 'writing in butter.' The criticism is not justifiable, although it must be admitted that the concluding passages of 'A Tale of a Glove' are hardly tolerable, particularly as the writer is plainly expecting his readers to approve as well as sympathise with the attitude of the old mother towards her son's secret affair of the heart when she had discovered that he is cherishing a woman's glove. Sympathy we cannot withhold — the writer is already strong enough to draw it out of us — despite that Jess has picked her son's pockets. Whereupon 'a curious game of chess was played with the glove, the players a silent pair.' The mother conceals the glove, the son recovers it; and then, finally, she cross-examines him outright. Vain is his assurance that 'it's a lassie in



London — I dinna ken her mickle,' and that there is no-one he cares for as he cares for his mother; she forces him to sacrifice the treasured property. 'It's wrang o' me, Jamie,' she says, 'but I canna bear to think o' ye carryin' that aboot sae carefu'.'

And Jamie (the description is now Leeby's) 'took it oot o' his pouch, an' kind o' hesitated. Syne he lays't on the back o' the fire, an' they sit thegither glowerin' at it.

"Noo, mother," he says, "you're satisfied, are ye no?"

'Ay,' Leeby ended her story, 'she said she was satisfied. But she saw 'at he laid it on the fire fell fond-like.'

More than one reader must have been stung by Jess's outrage — nowadays we think it nothing short of that — to a surreptitious hope that James McQuimpha's action under duress was similar to that of Byron when he destroyed by fire (also at a woman's request) the manuscript of a poem, well knowing that a duplicate was preserved elsewhere. As it turns out, the destruction of the glove had no meaning beyond the satisfaction it gave to a jealous mother. But Jamie is made to pay for his deception: and, significantly, it is the author, not Jess, who exacts the payment. Barrie's devotional feeling for this woman sitting at the Thrums window has already blinded him to the abnormality of her attitude to Leeby, whom she complacently refers to as the daughter who had 'stuck by me an' given up her life, an ye micht say, for me.' Anything approaching a slight on

Jess is, in Barrie's view, as ruthlessly punishable as George Eliot made the offences against marital convention by her heroines thirty years earlier. Readers of *Adam Bede* and *Felix Holt* will recall how relentlessly the author caused Hetty Sorrell and Mrs. Transome to be pursued to their Nemesis by the Furies of Life and Tragedy. And Barrie has written: 'The awful horror of the untrue son dogged my thoughts and called me to paint the picture.' Soon enough in *A Window in Thrums* is the intimation given to us that Jamie is about to receive punishment for daring to believe that the world could hold another woman than his mother:

"'Fine I ken, Jamie,' she said, "'at all my days on this earth, be they short or lang, I've you for a staff to lean on.'" (Jess's husband, it is advisable to interpolate, was still with her, nor are we given the impression that he was a broken reed) . . . Then comes the author's aside: 'Ah, many years have gone since then, but if Jamie be living now he has still those words to swallow.'

But let the right to punish one's characters in fiction be assumed for a moment. Let us grant Barrie his treatment of Jamie in order that the remarkable effect of the story's climax shall not be lost on us. Jamie does not return to the old village again until after his father, mother, and sister are dead. The return of the prodigal, however, is celebrated by no fatted calf-killing; he has neglected his loved ones for the woman in London, and it is a lonely, shamefaced, and

infinitely pathetic return, assailed by lean, remorseful memories. He slunk to the top of the brae with 'sic an' awful' meeserable face,' haunting the outskirts of the cottage, now occupied by strangers, a long while before he dared ask leave to go through the little place for the last time. And then he craved the final favour of being left alone in the kitchen for a brief moment. The woman of the cottage described the scene afterwards:

'I gaed oot, meanin' to leave 'im to 'imself', but my bairnie wouldna come, an' he said, "Never mind her," so I left her wi' 'im, an' closed the door. He was in a lang time, but I never kent what he did, for the bairn juist aye greets when I speir at her. I watched 'im frae the corner window gang doon the brae till he cam to the corner. I thocht he turned round there an' stood lookin' at the hoose. He would see me better than I saw him, for my lamp was i' the window, whaur I've heard tell his mother keepit her cruizey. When my man came in I speired at 'im if he'd seen anybody standin' at the corner o' the brae, an' he said he thocht he'd seen somebody wi' a little staff in his hand. Davit gaed doon to see if he was aye there after supper-time, but he was gone.'

And the book ends: 'Jamie was never again seen in Thrums.'

### III

The author's advance on his work hitherto, technically considered, is very patent in some

places, but hardly perceptible in others, although this is not surprising when we remember that much of *A Window in Thrums* was probably written earlier than some of the chapters of *Auld Licht Idylls*. We may find in Barrie's previous books an equivalent for many of the most felicitous pages of *A Window in Thrums*, such as those of the tender opening, which was extracted from the book six years later and issued as a penny tract with a new and quite irrelevant title, *The Sabbath Day*: those of the chapter, 'On the Track of the Minister,' in which the uncanny ability of village folk in ferreting out everybody else's business by a process of deduction is delightfully yet not ungenerously satirised; or the pages in which Jess and her family prepare to receive company; or those in which is described 'The Last Night,' sombre and heart-breaking.

## IV

*A Window in Thrums* was the result of 'an impulse.' It wrote itself, says Barrie, 'very quickly. I have read that I re-wrote it eight times, but it was written once only, nearly every chapter, I think, at a sitting.' Ten years longer he was to go on writing books that had Thrums and the people of Thrums for their inspiration, but only one of them can bear comparison with it in technical excellence and emotional power. This excellence and power have to be conceded whether the non-literary attitude of the author to his

characters and their conduct be approved or not.

The technical faults of *A Window in Thrums* demand consideration. One is a curious self-consciousness that affects much of the writing. 'Leeby had taken Jess's hand — a worn old hand that had many a time gone out in love and kindness when younger hands were cold. *Poets have sung and fighting men have done great deeds for hands that never had such a record. . . .*' 'A woman so good mated to a man so selfish that *I cannot think of her even now with a steady mouth. . . .*' 'In Thrums, when a weaver died, his womenfolk had to take his seat at the loom, and those who, by reason of infirmities, could not do so, went to *a place, the name of which, I thank God, I am not compelled to write in this chapter.* I could not, even at this day, have told any episodes in the life of Jess *had it ended in the poorhouse.*' The italics in these extracts are not Barrie's — they are employed to emphasise what may be effected by the personal method in narration.

Not yet, moreover, was the author aware that if the dialect speech of a 'regional' story is to be artistically introduced it must not be literally reported, but idiomatically suggested. 'Ou, she's naething by the ord'nar': but ye see she was mairit to a Tilliedrum man no lang syne, an' they're said to have a michty grand establishment. Ay, they've a wardrobe spleet new; an' what think ye Tibbie wears ilka day?' So runs an utterance, selected at random by one of the characters of

*A Window in Thrums.* And it will be noticed that the author endeavours to achieve his effect mainly by mis-spellings:—

“I fair forgot,” Hendry answered, “but what’s a’ yer steer?”

‘Jess looked at me (she often did this) in a way that meant, “What a man is this I’m tied to!”

“Steer!” she exclaimed. “Is’t no time we was makkin’ a steer? They’ll be in for their tea ony meenute, an’ the room no sae muckle as sweepit. Ay, an’ me lookin’ like a sweep; an’ Tibbie Meal-maker ’at’s sae partikler genteel seein’ you sic a sicht as ye are!”

It is not very intelligible, except to the reader born and bred ‘beyont the Tweed.’ We may profitably compare it with the transcriptions of Irish speech made in the plays of John M. Synge: ‘And to think it’s me is talking sweetly, Christy Mahon, and I the fright of seven townlands for my biting tongue. Well, the heart’s a wonder; and I’m thinking there won’t be our like in Mayo, for gallant lovers, from this hour to-day.’ It may usefully be imagined what the earlier Irish writers, those, for example, who belonged to what is known as the ‘Don Boucicault school,’ or, for that matter, the author of *A Window in Thrums* at this stage of his development, would have made of the utterance, above quoted, by Pegeen Mike in *The Playboy of the Western World*; or this snatch of Shawn Keogh’s in the same play: ‘I would, surely, and I’d give you the wedding-ring I have, and the loan of a new suit, the way you’d have him

decent on the wedding-day. I'd give you two kinds for your dinner, and a gallon of poteen, and I'd call the piper on the long car to your wedding from Crossmolina or from Ballina.' There is not a single word in either of Synge's speeches that contains a wrongly-placed letter. Not even the proper names used by Synge's characters are misspelt. And yet the reader, wholly through an artist's suggestion, is made to feel that in actuality many a word was distorted by these illiterate peasants, and that the names of 'Crossmolina' and 'Ballina' sounded as quaintly on their tongues as did Edinburgh and Glasgow on the tongues of Barrie's weavers in *A Window in Thrums*, where by rather crude, inartistic methods, the author takes care that the reader is aware of the distortion.

Perhaps it is unfair, though, to make one's comparison in this matter with Synge. For he was our supreme master of dialect speech, no artist has depended so entirely on a turn of phrase and so completely eliminated the need of the misspelt word. It is possible that Barrie's misuse of dialect was aggravated by the success he was then experiencing among people who cared very little for artistic performance, but everything for the literal chronicle of their own lost life of the Highlands. He was, in a familiar phrase, tempted to play to the gallery, crowded with exiled Scotsmen. Otherwise, as an artist (which he surely was fundamentally, though yet an immature one) he could never have committed the inartistic error

of introducing dialect words into his purely descriptive passages. We are told in one place that 'Leeby ran to the bed, and I went ben the house.' Again and again the non-Scot, who cannot be expected to know that 'a but and ben' is a house of only two rooms, and that 'ben the house' means the other room or other side of the house, seeks instinctively at the end of the book for a glossary that is not there.

## v

Three books had now been published in which, either weightily or as he passed to the main theme, Barrie had used the material offered him by his own home-place, and he was beginning to foresee that ere long this semi-imaginative exploitation would cease to be artistically profitable. Therefore he planned a novel through which the inevitable farewell to Thrums and his people might be pronounced worthily. He began to write *The Little Minister*, which the Rev. Donald Macleod had the satisfaction of printing serially in *Good Words* before it was published by that journal's proprietors, Messrs. Cassell & Company, in accordance with the three-volume fashion that was still prevalent. He continued to hanker after Kirriemuir, though, even when it was finished; and prompted by various circumstances he took his pen back to it more than once. The most moving of these circumstances was the death of his mother a few years later; and his tribute to



her had the humble Scottish life of his boyhood for background. Thus it is fitting that as *The Little Minister* failed to prove entirely worthy of standing as his literary farewell to Thrums there should be other books to which that distinction might be transferred triumphantly.

The serial issue of *The Little Minister* was reported at the time to have doubled the circulation of *Good Words*. In the matter of this serialisation Barrie was technically more circumspect than he had been with *When a Man's Single*, whose appearance from week to week taught him (although the example of Dickens with his hand-to-mouth method of serial publication should have been sufficient warning) that once the moving finger has begun to write and allowed what is written to appear in a public print not all the author's pious second thoughts can alter a word of it. By this time the name of J. M. Barrie was ubiquitous in the periodicals. Its current value to the London editors is shown in a receipted account which, being at the present time lodged in a famous second-hand bookshop, is no longer a private document, and which, dated 1892, details the acquirement of *Two of Them*, a short story of only 3,000 words, by *The Graphic* for £27. Barrie's position in the United States, we note in the same document, was more slowly consolidated; for the same story was acquired in the same year by an American magazine for only £15. *Two of Them* has not been reprinted; indeed he contributed much during those years of prospering

journalism that he allowed to lie buried in the files of periodicals. An example is *A Superfluous Man*, a novelette of twenty thousand words, which appeared in *The Young Man* month by month from January to December, 1889. Other stories, too, such as *A Tillyloss Scandal* and *An Auld Licht Manse*, were given to the world in a similar fashion. Each of them is interesting to look back upon, however, for Barrie's 'juvenilia' is as interesting to the student as his mature work: moreover, we have in them an indication of how liable he is to move in a groove once he has blazed his trail. *A Tillyloss Scandal* and *An Auld Licht Manse* are variations on a familiar theme (more or less), and *A Superfluous Man* is another version of *When a Man's Single*.

The superfluous man is Dan Moore, whom we meet first when he is endeavouring to thank his friends in a speech for their gift of a purse and sovereigns as he leaves Ballyhewan for London. (Observe the subtle change of the hero's nationality and his starting-point!) A genuine Barrie touch is noticeable in the very second paragraph of the narrative: Moore is a young man of whom 'it had better be admitted at once that he would have preferred seeing the Australian cricketers to spending an evening at Exeter Hall.' Another is manifest when Dan remarks to his father one evening, after they have been sitting together silently for some time: 'You seem to have given up answering advertisements.' The father answers 'It is the only way I can earn anything.' And in

response to Dan's request for an explanation he says: 'Well, last week my letters ran away with two shillings and sixpence; so this week, as I have written none, I may be said to have made two shillings and sixpence.' One of the author's pronouncements during the story is that 'All Irishmen are born politicians, just as all Scotsmen are born metaphysicians.'

Barrie was always to experience a difficulty in narrating action, and *A Superfluous Man* reveals what that difficulty signified during his 'non-age.' The concluding paragraph of one of the instalments in the *Young Man* reads grotesquely instead of, as was plainly the intention, impressively: —

'Dan followed the slight boyish figure into Holborn, through Lincoln's Inn Fields, and so by a side street to the Embankment. When the Irishman realised where the other was making for, the thought of suicide suddenly controlled his mind, and casting all other considerations aside he ran after the lad. The clatter of the pursuer's feet on the silent Embankment made the pursued look behind, and when he saw Dan close to him he screamed aloud in fear, and clambered up the parapet. His obvious intention was to fling himself into the water. . . . — (*To be continued.*)'

*The Superfluous Man* was also, or should have been, a warning to its author that another of his technical difficulties lay in plot-spinning. With what gusto he declared later in his career (in his

introduction to a new edition of *Conrad in Quest of His Youth*, by Leonard Merrick) that there is no such thing as a plot: 'in tragic life, God wot, no villain need be! Passion spins the plot!' The serial was brought to an end in a fashion most naïve, and suggesting that his was a forced conclusion to oblige an editor. 'Stories generally end to the sound of wedding-bells,' he suddenly remarks in the middle of a chapter, 'and this one is no exception to the rule. But marriage is not a profession with an income attached to it, and the superfluous man married is in a worse plight than the superfluous man a bachelor. It remains to be told how Dan at last joined the army of bread-winners.' From this it may be gathered that the hero had not yet obtained what the readers had waited a whole year to see him do, and what he came all the way from Ireland to London for — a job! All the same, Barrie manages to provide him with one and round off the narrative within the next six hundred words!

As for *A Tillyloss Scandal* and *An Auld Licht Manse*, the author's pronouncement on them when he learnt that they were being republished in America without his sanction, must be respected. 'I entirely disown them,' he said. But the ban does not apply to *A Superfluous Man*, although we must be honest on the matter and admit that it probably would have done if the little effort had ever been resurrected from the files of *The Young Man*.

## VI

While *The Little Minister* was appearing serially Barrie maintained the record he had established for himself of allowing no year to pass without the appearance of at least one book that bore his name on the title-page; he gathered together a sheaf of laughter-provoking, absurd and occasionally half-serious sketches which had been contributed to the *St. James's Gazette* and published them as *My Lady Nicotine*. His appeal to the popular taste was swifter and surer than ever, for the main theme of the book is tobacco and smoking. Barrie has whimsically stated that he wrote it while he was yet a non-smoker. He has also stated that the publication of what is no more than journalism was wholly for the purpose of securing his copy-right.

*My Lady Nicotine* is a ready-writer's product of its period. In the year 1890 Israel Zangwill was writing *The Batchelor's Club*, which was eventually received with similar enthusiasm by the man in the street who seldom read more than his daily paper. Like Zangwill's book, or Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, another successful book of the time, *My Lady Nicotine* records comically, or satirically, or farcically, the escapades, misadventures, and sentimental musings of a small group of rather likeable individuals, some foolish-wise, others wise-foolish, so that each of them grows sufficiently absurd in his turn to be the

writer's legitimate butt. It is not out of accord with what Mr. Square in *Tom Jones* would call 'the eternal fitness of things' that *My Lady Nicotine*, relatively unimportant though it is among Barrie's works, should have been the medium of more than one fortune made by the estimable personages who devoted their existence to the distribution of the fragrant weed. Thus the real romance of the volume was non-literary. It had chanced that just previous to the book's publication a tobacconist's shop in Wardour Street, London, changed hands, a certain Mr. Yapp having purchased it for £3,000 from Mr. Carrera — the name is not unfamiliar. Within three years, wholly and not at all indirectly through the good agency of Barrie and *My Lady Nicotine* Mr. Yapp re-sold the business to Mr. Bernhard Baron for a sum reputed to be £100,000.

When Mr. Yapp entered his shop one afternoon he stood aside to permit the departure of a customer whose face was sufficiently familiar (in the illustrated papers) to cause him to make inquiries. His assistant informed him that the customer was indeed 'Mr. Barrie,' and that he was a regular purchaser at the shop of a special blend of tobacco which was unobtainable elsewhere — the Craven Mixture. Whereupon the proprietor gave an order that when Mr. Barrie next appeared in the shop he, Mr. Yapp, was to be sought out and notified immediately. He was in the studio at Newman Street of Mr. Arthur Friedenson, the well-known artist whose painting, 'Runswick

Bay,' is now in the possession of the Tate Gallery, when the shop-boy entered hurriedly to inform Mr. Yapp that Mr. Barrie had called for his customary supply of tobacco, and was being detained according to instructions.

The tobacconist's question to the author of *My Lady Nicotine* was: 'Am I correct in thinking that the Craven Mixture for which you come to my shop is the original of the Arcadian Mixture in your book?' Barrie replied in the affirmative. 'Then,' said Mr. Yapp, 'would you bestow on me a great favour and make the same answer in writing?' The author's assent was readily given, and ever since that time the Craven Mixture has borne a replica of Barrie's certificate.

The tobacconist suggested that he should be allowed to supply Barrie with the tobacco gratuitously in the future, but the offer was refused. Promptly, however, he advanced the price of the Mixture twopence an ounce to his customers, and advertised it widely as the Arcadian Mixture of *My Lady Nicotine*, eventually, as we have already noted, making a far bigger fortune out of the book than the author has done himself.

## VII

Between the issues of *My Lady Nicotine* and *The Little Minister* Barrie made his first tentative efforts in a new direction. He began to write for the theatre.

Tentative those first efforts may legitimately be

called, although *Becky Sharp*, *Richard Savage*, and *Ibsen's Ghost* were all accepted for production and staged in the year of the book-publication of *A Little Minister*. *Richard Savage*, a romantic drama whose *personae* included Steele and Jacob Tonson, and whose scenes were filled with weird oaths and sword-clashings, was based on the life of the eighteenth-century poet, actor and vagabond immortalised by Dr. Johnson. In the writing of it Barrie had the collaboration of H. B. Marriott Watson, a young author who was beginning to be known as a novelist and whose wife was the poet, Rosamond Marriott Watson. 'The play had the shortest of lives,' records a historian of the nineteenth century stage. It was produced at a *matinée* on April 16th, 1891, in the Criterion Theatre, London; 'the audience applauded it, but the critics found fault heavily; it was never acted again, neither has it been printed.' A rhymed prologue was written for it by W. E. Henley, the friend of Stevenson and one of Barrie's editors; but the play has a better claim to distinction than that, for it was the only one at whose final curtain he ever appeared in response to the call of 'Author.' Lewis Hind remembers the occasion. 'Barrie was the size of a lead pencil, Marriott Watson a fir tree.'

*Becky Sharp*, a rather juvenile paraphrase of Thackeray's novel, was staged at Terry's Theatre, and *Ibsen's Ghost* at Toole's on the last day of May. '*Ibsen's Ghost* was the wittiest burlesque I ever saw,' writes Mr. H. M. Walbrook, a veteran of play-



goers, 'and it is a thousand pities that it has never been revived.' Barrie's name does not appear to have been printed in the programme; but the piece, a satire in one act, must be underlined in the chronology of Barrie's writings, for it is a genial though serious attempt to pour contempt on the vogue of Ibsenism, then at its high noon. *Hedda Gabler* had been introduced to English audiences just previously. Indeed *Ibsen's Ghost, or Toole-up-to-date: Hedda in one act* – to give the play its full title – was a mock *Hedda Gabler*, a defiant gesture of irresponsibility amid the solemnities. The presentation lasted only half-an-hour, but it was very successful. Hedda's widower, Tesman (acted by Mr. George Shelton, who was to become distinguished long afterwards in Barrie's most popular play, *Peter Pan*) has married a second wife, Thea (acted by Miss Irene Vanbrugh). Madame Tesman seems to have been as dark-natured as Hedda was, for when her husband asks if there is a 'k' in Christianity she replies, 'very weirdly and slowly,' 'There – is – nothing – in – Christianity.' And Tesman exclaims, 'Fancy that!' The satire ended with a scene of burlesque tragedy. Hedda in Ibsen's drama had destroyed herself with one of her father's pistols, but Barrie's heroine sought relief from her troubles with the aid of a child's pop-gun.

By virtue of *Ibsen's Ghost*, written when Barrie was only thirty years old, he ranks in the theatre as a contemporary of Ibsen and Oscar Wilde.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Only Three-Volume Novel and the First Three-Act Play

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I

MEANWHILE, the position of J. M. Barrie as an author of novels and stories was being made solid. For many people his work, like Stevenson's, even at the highest point of his success, had little or no appeal; and despite the skill of craft which was more and more compelling as Barrie's development proceeded, eventually to be that of a master of craft, and therefore demanding our appreciation for that reason if none other, he has never succeeded in overcoming an intellectual lack of sympathy and a temperamental estrangement among certain readers and playgoers — a proof in itself of the strength of Barrie's own temperament. In his own sphere, however, his popularity rapidly surpassed even that of the fellow-countryman who, hidden from his admirers on a Pacific island, had the additional advantage of having become at the beginning of the eighteen-nineties a shining figure of literary legend. In October, 1891, Barrie's first and only three-volume novel, *The Little Minister*, was issued by Messrs. Cassell and Company (Stevenson's publishers), re-published in a second edition before the year closed, and put forward during the following March in a single volume at the price of seven shillings and sixpence instead of a guinea and a half. By 1893 the advertisements of the book were announcing its thirty-fourth thousand, the achievement being commemorated by the issue of a

special edition with illustrations by W. Hole, R.S.A. Sixty-four thousand copies of *The Little Minister* were circulated before November, 1898; but as the production of the author's dramatic version, which bore the same title, had taken place in 1897, the enthusiasm may no longer be ascribed to the novel exclusively.

Compared to these figures, Stevenson's are inferior. *Treasure Island* was thirteen years in reaching its sixty-ninth thousand, *Kidnapped* passed the forty-eighth thousand in ten years, while the circulation of *The Master of Ballantrae*, which was issued two years earlier than *The Little Minister*, did not number thirty-thousand copies until three years after Barrie's novel had numbered thirty-four thousand.

The novel of *The Little Minister* was done in the grand manner. The introductory pages unfold the principle situation with the slow, dignified progress of dawn on Barrie's own 'barebackit' hills at home. But it is not long before we realise that this principle situation is to be the only one. Margaret Dishart, 'the old woman who was only forty-three,' accompanies her son Gavin on his entry into the Presbyterian ministry at Thrums, and it becomes evident that the novel was originally planned to be a portrayal of the life, manners, and religious sentiment of the now familiar weaving community. It is also evident that the author has discovered before he progresses far with his work the difficulty of building a long novel on such an uneventful theme. Indeed

there are definite signs of flagging. All his resources are summoned to his help, especially his chameleon gift of humorous and pathetic characterisation. He makes a superlative effort to go on building with fresh material. The interest of the story shifts over to the sentimental progress of the Rev. Gavin Dishart, and the sprightly methods adopted by the 'haggarty-taggart Egyptian' to captivate him while he still believed her to be truly an 'Egyptian', or gipsy, and not the young lady of quality that she eventually proved. The structure is a frail one, however, and no purple patch of heavily plastered sentiment, or of quaint phrasing or whimsical picture-making, can disguise the truth about it. Eventually it staggers ominously, and the novel carries the reader forward to its conclusion only because the elaboration by Barrie's genius for accessories is substantial enough to keep the framework in position when by itself it would have collapsed.

That Barrie was aware of his difficulties and remained on the watch for an opportunity of introducing further new material and once again diverting the interest is shown in a sudden and surprising revelation of guile in Nanny Webster, the simple soul who had been known previously as merely an old woman saved from the poor-house by the efforts of Babbie, the Egyptian. In the fifteenth chapter the old woman's face suddenly becomes 'cunning and ugly,' for no reason that we can detect except that a touch of dark realism might be introduced into the story.

In the absence of any further sign that Nanny is not all she might be, the slight on her character remains as an inartistic anomaly. Possibly Barrie intended that she should emerge as the prime evil-doer of the later part of the story and was unable to find an opening for the development of his idea.

## II

Whatever literary success the novel may have had must be attributed to the charm and delight of the writing. Even the critical reader would find it irresistible. Barrie knew even at that early time how to create a winsome and winning character. And although Gavin Dishart occasionally wearies the reader with his blustering habit of ordering somebody or other about and of waxing noisily wrathful when he is disobeyed, this 'shortest hero in fiction,' as the author called him in a later commentary on the book, gives the aesthetic pleasure that a later generation has found in watching the performance of the *Piccole Maschere* — the Italian Marionettes.

Lady Babbie is a lovable heroine; a sweet truant from some pagan land of fairies and elves. She dances along the pages of the novel as easily as she has danced, barefooted and barelegged, among the autumn-red leaves of Caddam woods. The clearest of many bewildering impressions left by the book is that of Babbie in her leaf-green gypsy's raiment, with scarlet berries in her flying hair:

'Shall we not laugh at the student who chafes when between him and his book comes the song of the thrushes, with whom, on the mad night when you danced into Gavin's life, you had more in common than with Auld Licht ministers? The gladness of living was in your step, your voice was melody, and he was wondering what love might be. You were the daughter of a summer night, born where all the birds are free, and the moon christened you with her soft light to dazzle the eyes of man. Not our little minister alone was stricken by you into his second childhood. To look upon you was to rejoice that so fair a thing could be; to think of you is still to be young.'

When Barrie wrote *A Window in Thrums* he maintained his artistic scruples to the book's conclusion, despite that 'when the English publishers read *A Window in Thrums* in manuscript they thought it unbearably sad, and begged me to alter the end. They warned me that the public do not like sad books. Well, the older I grow' — the words belong to 1896 — 'and the sadder the things I see, the more do I wish my books to be bright and hopeful; but an author may not always interfere with his story, and if I had altered the end of *A Window in Thrums* I think I should never have had any more respect for myself. It is a sadder book to me than it can ever be to anybody else. . . . But the thing had to be done.'

In contrast *The Little Minister* suffered from a lack of conviction, and probably in this

is the explanation why Barrie's treatment of the ending is less scrupulous. '*The Little Minister* ought to have ended badly,' Stevenson wrote. 'We all know it did; and we are infinitely grateful to you for the grace and good feeling with which you lied about it.' The excellently described tragedy of the flood, one feels, had its natural culmination in Peter Tosh's prayer, 'O Lord, lift this mist, for it's mair than we can bear.' It is at these words that the artist's conclusion should have come.

## III

Barrie's ability to make full and important use of an idea which has already appeared casually during a previous piece of writing is well illustrated in his first ambitious work for the theatre, *Walker, London*. This was produced at Toole's Theatre (which stood where now is a hospital near Charing Cross) on February 25, 1892. The plot of *Walker, London* recalls not only the house-boat incident in *When a Man's Single*, but also the earlier short play *Richard Savage* in which two lovers are liberated from an unsatisfactory pledge and yet each is left with the impression that the other has made a sacrifice. It is a farcical comedy in three acts, and proved very successful. At curtain fall on the first night, J. L. Toole came forward and apologised for the author's failure to take a call, giving as one of the reasons that 'Mr. Barrie does not smoke.' The

shaft was aimed at Oscar Wilde, whose *Lady Windermere's Fan* had lately been produced, and whose appearance in front of the curtain with a cigarette in his fingers as he blandly informed the first-night audience that he had spent a very enjoyable evening caused a sensation and some indignation.

The humour of *Walker, London* is similar in kind to that of *Better Dead* and *My Lady Nicotine*. And just as in this piece we have a full exploitation of earlier material, so in its turn does it provide material for another play, *The Admirable Crichton*, which also may roughly be described as a study of a sudden pathetic accession to power. *Walker, London* is of little importance apart from what it leads to, and the author probably thought so, for thirty years elapsed before it was printed. It is so skilfully amusing, however, that it would probably survive the test of a revival. The scene is on the Thames, near Maidenhead, and the chief character a humble London hairdresser named Jasper Phipps, who runs away on his wedding morning, taking the honeymoon money with him. Not with dishonest intention, though, but because he has decided to take the honeymoon before the marriage, and to have it by himself. He explains this in a letter to the baffled bride. 'Then, my girl, when my week's leave is up, I will come back and marry you. Fear not, I am staunch. And don't follow me. Your affectionate Jasper. P.S.—I love you! I love you! I love you!'

Jasper is walking along the bank of the river



when he sees a lovely young lady fall into the water. She is pulled out by a boatman, and Jasper bribes him to inform the maiden when she recovers consciousness that he, Jasper, is the heroic rescuer. The grateful maiden invites Phipps to the houseboat on which she is holidaying with her mother and brother. The houseboat had been christened 'The Wild Duck' – another fun-poke at Ibsen. They and a number of friends welcome Phipps with effusive gratitude. He introduces himself on the spur of the moment as a renowned African explorer, and for a whole week is more popular and more important than he has ever been in his life. And somehow, though ignorant and delightfully illiterate, he contrives to avoid exposure, although he is continually finding himself in ticklish situations.

'JASPER: I shot an elephant once. Oh, yes, I did! I met the elephant in a forest and I had an air-gun with me, and I shot it. You can't shoot without a gun in Africa. You would be surprised if you had seen the birds, the way they came down and pecked that elephant. Hundreds of them.'

'MRS. GOLIGHTLY: What kind of birds?'

'JASPER: O, there were eagles and snipe, vultures, sparrows, canaries, turkeys, and bull rushes, the oof bird – they ate that elephant up and left nothing but the trunk.'

'NANNY: And what did you do with the trunk?'

'JASPER: O, I had it packed up. No, no, I had the trunk made into a portmanteau.'

Almost he betrays himself when someone asks

if he saw many mosquitoes. 'Mosquitoes? Mosquitoes? O, yes, thousands of 'em. Why, they were so tame they used to come and eat out of my hand.'

## IV

While the laughter raised by *Walker, London* still echoed through the town – it ran for three hundred performances – D'Oyly Carte produced at the Savoy Theatre a 'new and original comic opera, *Jane Annie, or the Good Conduct Prize*, with libretto by J. M. Barrie and Conan Doyle.' If the young collaborators had dreamed dreams of rivalling Gilbert and Sullivan at that famous home of comic opera they were soon to be disillusioned. The production was a failure, never again to be heard of, except in Messrs. Chappell's print of the text; and to-day the only entertainment to be derived from a reading of it lies in the effort to separate the Barrie from the Doyle. We seem to distinguish Barrie's hand in the announcement that the first act takes place in 'a Seminary for the Little Things that Grow into Women,' and in certain of the lyrics, especially the following stanza:

'There was once a man in a seaside town,  
And his name it was – what was it?  
I know it wasn't Smith, and I'm sure it wasn't  
Brown,  
But it was – oh, Lord, what was it?'

Also, a bride is asked what she and her husband are going to live on. 'Oh,' she answers brightly, 'we have worked that out very carefully. First of all, he is to sell out. Then he has a friend who wrote a novel in six weeks and got £1,000 for it. Well, Jack has much more ability than his friend, so he is to adopt novel-writing as a profession, and as £1,000 in six weeks comes to £8,666 13s. 4d. a year, we shall be quite comfortable.' This, at least, may safely be attributed to Barrie; for he had already introduced us to the out-of-work individual in *A Superfluous Man* who was only able to make an income by not writing letters applying for situations and thus 'earning' half a crown a week, the amount saved in stamp-money.

## v

Barrie was now thirty-four years of age. In a contemporary magazine Sir George Douglas gave a personal impression of him as he appeared at the time. 'To the bodily eye, Mr. Barrie has little, nothing of the typical Scot. The high pale brow, the dark hair and eye, the chiselled refinement of the profile, suggest Italy rather than the North. To me the face bears a certain resemblance to portraits of Edgar Allan Poe. The expression is shy, absorbed. There is a little trace of affectation in the manner as in the writing. It is only in a touch of *brusquerie* in the address that the Northerner is revealed.'

A letter reached him from Samoa just after he recovered from a dangerous illness. It is dated August 12, 1894. 'And here, Mr. Barrie,' Stevenson wrote, 'is news with a vengeance. Mother Hubbard's dog is well again — what did I tell you? Pleurisy, pneumonia, and all that kind of truck is quite unavailing against a Scotchman who can write.' The assertion was a brave fallacy, for 'that kind of truck' was availing only too surely against Stevenson himself. The letter was the last that Barrie appears to have received from him, and by the end of the year his personal association with 'Tusitala' was broken for ever.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Successes in Two Arts

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I

IN THE history of all artists, great and small, there is a moment at which the revelation has been vouchsafed to them that they are standing on the threshold of achievement, that their work hitherto is but a preparation for maturity. So it must have been with J. M. Barrie; and although he may have believed until then that the books he had written were vitally important, the success they had earned giving strength to the belief, he inevitably found himself enveloped in a new sweeping certainty about the accomplishment of the past ten years and the work that lay before him. Shakespeare had suggested the scope of that revelation in a stabbing and awful epigram: 'What's Past is Prologue.' Untiring and prolific though Barrie was in his writing, there is actually evidence that he paused, albeit nearly imperceptibly, and took his bearings in the flashing light of his sudden realisation.

The esteem of those contemporaries whose judgement he most trusted was, he now felt, mainly the expression of their confidence in his future, and *A Window in Thrums*, *Auld Licht Idylls*, and *The Little Minister* were no more than the basis of that confidence. That he should have divined this important truth about a matter so easily misunderstood and was not for a moment made arrogant by a record which might have deceived some writers into easy duplications for the

rest of their lives of what the record represented was Barrie's greatest triumph yet. It was fitting, therefore, that the play which he proceeded to chisel out of the inchoate glittering mass that is *The Little Minister* should prove to be a worthier work than the novel, and that the story entitled *Sentimental Tommy* was the real achievement in fiction that *The Little Minister* might have been. He seemed to have lost his helplessness, his inclination to fall into a panic as he faced the 'poor, dear, dull, real life' which impinged on his consciousness in a way that certain phases of it, such as pain and distress, prison and punishment, usually hidden from the majority of men, impinge upon every sensitive conscience. It is not within the power even of genius to evade actuality altogether, for vital literature is always what Mr. Bernard Shaw has defined as 'a cross between art and life, art being of one sex only, and quite sterile by itself.' All artists have a private difficulty to solve when they come to the point at which their attitude to the actual existence around them must be rationalised. Barrie had long since realised that his purpose in art was to treat life as he, the artist, apprehended life, not as other people, artists or critics, would have him perceive it, whether it was the life yonder at home whose boundaries were the stately homes and venerable castles of Cortachie, Airlie, Glamis, Balfour, and Inverquhar, the Tower of Clova, and the glen Doll and Doll rock; or the life of the southern city of his struggles and

success. The secret of triumphant art is always ridiculously simple; the artist has been true to his own individual and independent vision, in scorn of all the consequences. If there is any discrepancy between his belief about life and the belief of the rest of mankind the shortcoming is not his. True, the triumphant artist may not have a single moment of success in the material sense, which is not surprising if we bear in mind that the greater the artist the bigger his step beyond what the public imagine they want, the higher the beauty and truth than have yet been generally experienced. It happens (is it really a thing of chance?) that in many instances the ordinary mind can readily attune itself, after a brief moment of strangeness, to the note which the artist is sounding. The ordinary mind may have been wistfully seeking, listening, for that strange and arresting note. It was waiting for Barrie's, and welcomed it, moreover, for he is an instance of the genius who has arisen in response to the people's spiritual aspiration; welcomed that note, indeed, as surely as, long ago, it waited for and welcomed Charles Dickens's irresistibly sounding note which first issued from a London street in the year when Victoria ascended the throne, and broke off thirty-three years later upon the hill in Kent that the pilgrims once passed to Canterbury, and where Sir John Falstaff drank and blustered.

But Barrie's progress, as we have seen, was not without its spiritual battles. A mordant streak in his temperament required to be sublimated.

It had already discomfited him in varying degrees, slightly in *A Window in Thrums*, perilously in *The Little Minister*, and hopelessly in *When a Man's Single*: and it was to discomfit him again even in the relative security of his mature period, luring him along the path of realism, or rather 'actualism,' that has been so taken by so many worthy dramatists with consequences disastrous to themselves and their audiences. Barrie's mind is essentially fantastic – the 'something quaint' he had discerned long ago in the 'Auld Lichts' of Kirriemuir was in himself. But it is also a satirical mind. The marriage between fantasy and satire was a tardy one, but it was perfect. To either partner in the union the absence of the other was to be devastating. Without satire the tenderness, sympathy, and poetry were unbalanced sentiment. Without fantasy Barrie's efforts resulted in a play as cynically barren as, say, *Little Mary*. And when neither fantasy nor satire was evident, and Barrie so far forgot himself that he hovered near the heartily mocked Ibsenism as human beings so often are drawn toward the things that repel them, the consequence was *The Wedding Guest* or the first of the versions of *The Legend of Leonora*. Compared to these two dark deeds in the playhouse career which Barrie was now entering upon in earnest, *Little Mary* is ethereal perfection.

## II

*The Professor's Love Story*, that followed *Walker*,



*London* and preceded *The Little Minister* in the theatre, was an attempt to blend fantasy and satire, but the satire was trivial, and the play remained little more than three acts of sentiment. Professor Goodwillie, who has fallen in love during middle age with Lucy, his pretty secretary, is so ignorant of everything except dry-as-dust pedantry that he has not the least idea of what has happened to him, and he actually consults a doctor! On learning the nature of his complaint he is so bewildered and annoyed that he snaps out, 'But who is the woman?'

We may safely relegate this 'comedy of Scottish life' to the past that is Barrie's prologue. William Archer did not hesitate to denounce it as 'a calculated disloyalty to art, a patchwork of extravagant farce, mawkish sentiment, irrelevant anecdote.' But theatregoers found in it so much to their liking that although the comedy was first produced at the Comedy Theatre on June, 25 1894, the last performance did not take place until the end of 1895. The American production was also a great success. And, after all, did not the amazing Professor Goodwillie (the Rev. Gavin Dishart grown older and more stupid) make his discovery about love in late summer, with the sights and sounds of harvest everywhere, honeysuckle-laden cottages, stooked sheaves of corn, and a trysting tree? And was not this trysting tree haunted long before, by Miss Goodwillie, the professor's spinster sister, who had been so bitterly disappointed in her own love

that she put every possible obstacle in the way of Lucy, until one day, happening to pass by the old tree again she finds a letter hidden deep in its trunk – the letter containing the offer of marriage that she had been waiting for all these years? Her lover did not fail her, after all! Whereupon, Miss Goodwillie is Lucy's staunchest ally for evermore.

## III

The fashion that prevailed very noticeably in the eighteen-nineties of turning popular novels into plays – du Maurier with *Trilby*, and Anthony Hope with *The Prisoner of Zenda*, preceded Barrie – had a satisfactory result in *The Little Minister*. The play is ostensibly a comedy with a background of distressed and desperate weavers, but in reality a tour-de-force in comic art, and magnificently impressive in its superiority over *The Professor's Love Story*. In preparation for the writing of this play its author divested his art of its superfluities, and by making the four acts a substantial, granite-true whole, it became the first dramatic epitome of his positive qualities. An extraordinary skill in depicting the homely Scottish ideal was one of the two most notable of those qualities, and the other his free and apparently irresponsible gift of playing with Puck like a brother. The technical power is sure and incisive, and neither in dialogue, scene, nor action is there any superfluity. A well-proportioned

movement carries the story on, and there is a steady undercurrent of fun that captivates the shrewd as well as the unsophisticated spectator.

The novel is hardly recognisable in the play, and much more imposing creations than we had thought them are the elders who were previously submerged in the flood of lovers' cross-talk. Moreover, a character is revealed in a single sentence, as when Jean, walking to church, retorts grimly to someone who speaks to her: 'I can neither hear nor see. I am wearing my best alpaca.' The play has never been printed in book-form, and the only impression of it that later generations have been able to gain is from the revival in London during 1923. But Mr. Bernard Shaw, who as the critic of *The Saturday Review* was so replete with Ibsen's heavy dishes—he had made Ibsen the subject of at least nine of his weekly articles in the previous twelve months—that he could afford to be generous to the purveyors of the fruit and nuts, considered the original production of *The Little Minister* 'self-sufficing,' and saw no reason why such 'a very toothsome' combination should not go on being performed until the next century. But he took strong exception to the final curtain. The little minister announces his intention of caning Babbie whenever she deserves it, and she flings her arms round his neck and exclaims ecstatically that he is the man for her. It is a quaint expression of Barrie's satire, perhaps, a sinister sentiment with a mocking twist, but Mr. Shaw might have interpreted it

differently if he had known how the author was to use the idea again in *Dear Brutus*:

'MATEY (*pulling her ear*): And don't you forget it.

'LADY CAROLINE (*with the curiosity of woman*): What would you do if I were to forget it, great bear?

'MATEY: Take a stick to you.

'LADY CAROLINE (*so proud of him*): I love to hear you talk like that: it is so virile. I always knew that it was a master I needed.

'MATEY: It's what you all need.

'LADY CAROLINE: It is, it is, you knowing wretch.'

*The Little Minister* fell rather short of fulfilling Mr. Shaw's prophecy about its length of run. Actually, with Mr. Cyril Maude and Miss Winifred Emery in the leading parts, the play lasted more than a year at the Haymarket, London, and in America also, and it made a fortune. Miss Maude Adams was Lady Babbie at the theatre on Broadway, where it totalled three hundred performances. But Barrie is said to have derived his greatest satisfaction elsewhere than theatrical box-offices. George Meredith invited him to dramatise *Evan Harrington*.

#### IV

Between the productions of *A Professor's Love*

*Story* and *The Little Minister* Barrie made his first visit to the United States in company with Robertson Nicoll. On their return in November, 1896, the editor of the *British Weekly* was asked by a newspaper reporter how his companion had fared among the Americans. He stated that 'Mr. Barrie had allowed himself to be interviewed as long as he could; then I tried to help him, and really we did very well.' He went on to relate an interesting incident that brightened the journey to New Orleans. A newsboy came up to them during the railway travelling, holding out a copy of 'Barrie's new novel' – not knowing, of course, who they were. The boy informed them that Barrie was the best selling author in the United States at the time, but, he added, 'they pirate him.'

Whereupon Barrie arranged with his American publishers, Messrs. Scribners, to issue an authorised edition of all the novels, tales, and sketches that he desired to preserve. In the preface to this series he wrote: 'I know not how many volumes purporting to be by me are in circulation in America which are no books of mine. I have seen several of them, bearing such titles as *Two of Them*, *An Auld Licht Manse*, and *A Tillyloss Scandal*. They consist of scraps collected and published without my knowledge, and I entirely disown them. I have written no books save those that appear in this edition.' Of the pirated books *A Tillyloss Scandal* was the most popular, and three different publishers issued versions. I

need hardly be said that these disowned volumes are valued by book-collectors more highly to-day than the majority of the authorised publications!

While Barrie was in New York he met Charles Frohman, the most gifted and famous theatrical producer that America has known. Their acquaintance began on business terms, but quickly it developed into a friendship which was only interrupted at Frohman's accidental death in 1915. 'This humorous, gentle, roughly educated, very fine American gentleman,' Barrie has since written of him, and characterises him, very properly, as 'the man who never broke his word,' for Frohman never made a written contract with anybody, his verbal agreement being always sufficient. And again: 'This Niagara of a man. . . . They could have lit a city with his vitality.' Barrie entrusted all his plays to Frohman for production on both sides of the Atlantic, and he could have made no more advantageous choice. Frohman's admiration for him was whole-souled; and his efforts in the theatre on Barrie's behalf often had real distinction; and his faith in the dramatist was remarkable enough to inspire the legend that if Barrie had asked Frohman to produce a dramatisation of the Telephone Directory he would smile and say with enthusiasm, 'Fine! Who shall we have in the cast?'

When Frohman was in London he used to say that his favourite instruction to a cab-driver was: 'Drive to the Strand, go down to Adelphi Terrace, and stop at the first smell of pipe-smoke.'

Sometimes when he was in Barrie's rooms high up in the Adelphi his host would notify Mr. Bernard Shaw, who lived at the top of the house opposite. So he opened the window and threw bread-crusts across at Shaw's window-panes. 'In a few minutes' — Mr. D. Frohman and Mr. J. F. Narcossan tell the story in their memoir of Frohman — 'the familiar grinning face would pop out. Shaw yelled: "Are you inviting me to a feast, Barrie — are you casting bread upon the troubled waters, or is it just Frohman?"' Another story illuminates the essential simplicity of Barrie's character. Frohman once succeeded in persuading him to make the journey to Paris, and determined to give his friend 'the time of his life.' So he engaged a magnificent suite of rooms for him at the Hotel Meurice in the Rue Royale, ordered a sumptuous dinner at the Café de Paris for the first evening, booked a box at the Théâtre Français to follow the dinner, and engaged a smart victoria to be at their service until long after midnight. Barrie was dazed by the Meurice suite, we are told, but 'he survived it.' He expressed a wish, however, that they might dine quietly at the hotel, and afterwards, when Frohman asked him formally how they should spend the evening, he proposed a country fair. A country fair? Yes, one of the old-fashioned kind that had not yet vanished from the land. . . . Meekly Frohman acquiesced, although, as he secretly fingered the wasted theatre tickets in his pocket he said desperately, 'We'll go out in a victoria.'

'No,' replied Barrie, all unconscious, 'I think it would be more fun to go on a 'bus.'

## v

In the year 1899, a book by J. M. Barrie was circulated which only a few people have ever seen or are likely to see, and which will probably never be reprinted. The circulation contrasted remarkably with the big-figure issue of some of his writings, for it was restricted to a few privately printed copies, and apart from one which was included in a purchase of the 'complete' works of Barrie, there has been little or no sign of the book since it was written. In 1906 the author was approached personally by a biographical authority, who had been unable to obtain the work, and he received a reply that 'the pamphlet you mention is of no value. As it is strictly private you must forgive me if I do not send you a copy.'

The correspondent was the late Alfred D. Taylor, who had compiled and was naturally anxious to make complete his famous *Catalogue of Cricket Literature*. For Barrie's book (or pamphlet, as he seemed to prefer it to be called) was entitled simply *Cricket*, and it may be taken as the measure of his devotion to a game which has always occupied much of his mind, both in art and domestic life. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch reminded the readers of the old *Speaker* that when Barrie put together in a little volume eleven sketches of



eleven men of name and fame in and beyond the Scots capital he called them *An Edinburgh Eleven* for the same reason that 'fond admirers speak of Mr. Arthur Shrewsbury (upon whose renown it is notorious that the sun never sets) as "the Notts Professional," and of a yet more illustrious cricketer by his paltry title of "Doctor" —

"Not so much honouring thee,  
As giving it a hope that there  
It could not withered be."

*An Edinburgh Eleven* is thus a cricketer's title though it may not label a cricketer's book. Earlier in 1883 he contributed a 'leader' to the *Nottingham Journal* entitled 'A Rural Cricket Match.' His love of the game was firm-rooted in boyhood. Moreover, it has been publicly self-confessed on more than one occasion, although there is on record that at a dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund he tried to deceive his listeners by speaking on cricket and football simultaneously, mixing up the terms and jargon of the two games as though he were hopelessly ignorant of them both! And yet, he solemnly informed the burghers of Dumfries, when they presented to him the freedom of their borough, that as the greatest moment in anybody's life has nothing to do with his profession or with whatever work he has devoted most of his life to, it was natural that his own greatest moment should have nothing to do with literature, but everything to do with cricket. 'In the summer of this year it happened to be.

I was asked by a cricket eleven of undergraduates playing against a Gloucestershire village team – the county of the Graces, you know – I was asked to fill a temporary vacancy – and they put me on to bowl, and I did the hat-trick.’

Naturally the references to cricket in Barrie’s writings are numerous, and in his happiest vein. When Nell Meredith speaks disparagingly to Will Abinger about one of his friends, in *When a Man’s Single*, that young hero worshipper declares, with an air of giving an overwhelming rebuttal, that ‘he made a hundred and three against Rugby and was only bowled off his pads.’ Later on Will discovers that a famous explorer does not know what l.b.w. means, and although he could not despise a man who had shot lions, ‘he never had quite the same respect for the King of beasts again.’ Then, towards the end of the same book, we hear of a great enthusiast who, having wooed Nell, ‘found that he had to give up either Nell or a cricket match, and so Nell was reluctantly dropped.’ In *The Little White Bird* there is a delicious chapter about a cricket match between two boys to determine the sex of a new arrival in the family, expected any day – ‘if he won it was to be a girl, and if I won it was to be a boy.’ The chapter could have been written by no one without a technical understanding of cricket.

It is inevitable that allusions to cricket should be more common in the prose-writings than in the close-knit plays. *Walker, London*, however, has

its Mr. Upjohn, a county cricketer who made 121 for Middlesex against Notts, and he also 'was only bowled off his pads.' Mr. Upjohn is worshipped by a boy who calls himself 'W.G.' 'because he likes to fancy that he is a reincarnation of W. G. Grace, England's great nineteenth-century cricketer.' (The eternal mind of the boy—how well Barrie knows it!—is in that brief stage-direction). 'I would rather take three wickets in an over,' vows this 'W.G.,' 'than be Shakespeare and Homer and all those swells put together.'

Away in the Cotswolds an annual match has been played between Barrie's team of cricketers, skippered by him, and known as the 'Allabarries,' and a team called 'The Artists.' The air waxes fierce no longer with their old antagonisms, and some day the names of the players themselves may be placed on record. None, of course, could give the list more felicitously than the captain of the 'Allabarries' himself. Mr. E. V. Lucas, however, has already revealed to the world (unintentionally) one of Barrie's most characteristic cricket secrets. Readers of Mr. Ashley-Cooper's *Hambledon Cricket-Chronicle* may recall Mr. Lucas's description in it of a modern Hambledon beating an Eleven of All England by five wickets, despite that a record of half-a-crown a run had been promised to the professional making the highest score. 'The name of the benefactor,' writes Mr. Lucas, 'has never been divulged, nor will I now trespass on his wish for secrecy, beyond saying that but for him the

slender band of those men of eminence who are distinguished by the Order of Merit would have no Scottish dramatist among them.' Sir James Barrie was awarded the Order of Merit in 1922. The match referred to by Mr. Lucas was played in 1908.

So has the game of cricket remained at the front of Barrie's mind. It is steadfast in the mind of Barrie the artist also, for one of the latest things he has written is a story containing the following passage:

'A rural cricket-match in buttercup time, seen and heard through the trees; it is surely the loveliest scene in England and the most disarming sound. From the ranks of the unseen dead, for ever passing along our country lanes on their eternal journey, the Englishmen fall out for a moment to look over the gate of the cricket-field and smile.'

## VI

At a luncheon arranged by the Institute of Journalists to welcome the Australian cricketers to England in 1926 the proposer of the toast to 'Cricket' was Barrie. His speech was memorable. A guest at the Savoy Hotel likened him to 'Peter Pan at the speaker's wicket making big hits off every ball,' for Barrie is an experienced orator as well as cricketer. It was then plain to see that he has earnestly studied the art of speaking, and especially is the fact manifest in the ease with

which he will rise from his chair, assume a homely manner (with one foot resting on the seat he has just vacated), and putting on an air of melancholy and a perfectly expressionless face he utters his gay quips and fancies — probably between puffs at an enormous cigar. That he became aware very quickly of the pitfalls of public speaking may be observed in his story *A Superfluous Man*, where he expresses the opinion that 'the very worst time to photograph a man is when he is see-sawing in the throes of a speech.'

Barrie has been quick to pay his tribute to his interpreters in the theatre, and they have responded. Miss Maude Adams, who is one of the most famous of leading ladies, has said: 'Wherever I act I always feel that there is one unseen spectator, J. M. Barrie.' 'After nearly four hundred performances of *Mary Rose*,' a player in that piece has written, 'Barrie sat in the O.P. corner watching the play, as was his custom; and when we came off he congratulated us upon the way we had kept up our acting after so long. It was only natural that we should have done, because we all loved the author as well as his words, and though we always acted our best we tried to act even better than our best when we saw him in the corner.'

The gift of a little play, *The Lady's Shakespeare: One Woman's Reading of 'The Taming of the Shrew'*, otherwise known as *Shakespeare's Legacy*, was Barrie's recognition of one of Miss Adams's renderings. He has said of her: 'Miss Adams

knows my characters and understands them. She really needs no directions. I love to write for her and see her in my work.' Other gifts of a similar nature to other interpreters have been *Pantaloon* to Miss Pauline Chase, and the original manuscript of *Afterthought; or, What Happened to Wendy*, to Miss Hilda Trevelyan. In Charles Frohman's biography it is recorded that Barrie was so delighted by one of Miss Trevelyan's portrayals that he cabled immediately after the first performance to Frohman in America. What Barrie said in that cable is not told; but on her breakfast-table next morning Miss Trevelyan found a cable from Frohman doubling her salary.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Margaret Ogilvy and Sentimental Tommy*

★

I

LIFE had enriched Barrie with friendship, but life had also taken friendship away. In one of the prefaces to the limited edition of his novels, tales, and sketches, that Messrs. Scribners published in America in 1896, occurs this passage: 'They were written to please one woman who is now dead, but as I am writing a little book about my mother I shall say no more of her here.' The book was *Margaret Ogilvy*. It appeared in December, 1896, two months later than *Sentimental Tommy*, the only other prose-work that went between covers until 1899 — unless we make an exception in the case of *A Lady's Shoe*, a story that comprised part of an anthology entitled: '*Miss Parson's Adventure*, by W. Clark Russell, and Other Stories by Other Writers,' published in 1894 by Messrs. Chapman and Hall. Clark Russell was evidently a bigger attraction to the public at that time even than Barrie; other contributors were W. E. Norris and Julian Hawthorne. Casually turning those old pages we alight on the statement that 'so-called intimate objects, accustomed to the married life, such as shoes, and gloves, and spectacles, mourn the loss of their mate even as Christians do,' and we know that the story, a hundred years' history in dainty miniature of a shoe, with a Gretna Green wedding to punctuate it, is Barrie's, and can be none other's.

Barrie was always whole hearted in his literary

adventuring. He had shown a predilection for the art of the drama in 1891, and concentrated on it so exclusively that during the next eight years only three prose-works of book length were written. Among these *Margaret Ogilvy* cannot be regarded as a premeditated book in the sense that *Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel* were premeditated, for the publication of the two latter works did not begin until two years after their author hinted about them to Stevenson, who answered: 'I am a little in the dark about this new work of yours. . . . What is it?' Stevenson was never to be fully enlightened, for he was dead before the first part of the story of *Sentimental Tommy* was completed.

*Margaret Ogilvy, by Her Son*, appeared in a cheaper book than Barrie's novels, for Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton issued it in December, 1893, at five shillings. The fifth edition was announced in 1899, so that its effect on readers is apparent. They were profoundly moved by this undisguised and heartfelt tribute to one they had already known through the earlier stories. It is done with an exquisite simplicity. Barrie has made living for ever the strong and dour, lovable and shrewd woman who was curiously characteristic of her period. Not Barrie's mother alone, we feel, is in her portrait, but all the mothers of her generation. We surrender to the author at once, aware of the precious relation of his characters, and confident that no other and false relation will be imposed upon them. As a



document *Margaret Ogilvy* will be regarded by posterity side by side with Sir Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*. There were critics at the time of its appearance who did not hesitate to complain about what they termed a lack of reticence. *Father and Son* would doubtless have represented for these the extreme limit of personal statement about such a relationship.

Any example of the dialogue manifests the nature of the work:

'I often go into the long parks, mother, and sit on the stile at the edge of the wood till I fancy I see a little girl coming toward me with a flagon in her hand.'

'Jumping the burn (I was once so proud of my jumps!) and swinging the flagon round so quick that what was inside hadna time to fall out. I used to wear a magenta frock and a white pinafore. Did I ever tell you that?'

'Mother, the little girl in my story wears a magenta frock and a white pinafore.'

'You minded that! But I'm thinking it wasna a lassie in a pinafore you saw in the long parks of Kinnordy, it was just a gey done auld woman.'

'It was a lassie in a pinafore, mother, when she was far away, but when she came near it was a gey done auld woman.'

'And a fell ugly one!'

'The most beautiful one I shall ever see.'

'I wonder to hear you say it. Look at my wrinkled auld face.'

'It is the sweetest face in all the world.'

'See how the rings drop off my poor wasted finger.'

'There will always be some one nigh, mother, to put them on again.'

One exquisite prose-lyric in the book was to have its echo all the way down Barrie's own history:

'I suppose I was an odd little figure; I have been told that my anxiety to brighten her gave my face a strained look and put a tremor into the joke (I would stand on my head in the bed, my feet against the wall, and then cry excitedly, "Are you laughing, mother?")'

*Margaret Ogilvy*, whose beauty was felt in some measure by nearly everyone who believes that not only the devil has the right to the fullest possible expression when he occupies the centre of the stage, is in some ways a memorial, but in others it is a prophecy. 'Nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much,' the author remarks at one point, and those who already know his later work think immediately of *Peter Pan*, *Mary Rose*, and *Sentimental Tommy*. The eeriness of some of the work that was to come during the next twenty-five years is suggested in the passage about 'Hyde Park, which, so gay by day, is haunted when night comes by the ghosts of many mothers, who run, wild-eyed, from seat to seat, looking for their sons.'

## II

The other book of 1896, *Sentimental Tommy*,

was really the first volume of a lengthy novel, for the sequel *Tommy and Grizel* which followed in 1900, is better described as a continuation. All the circulations of Barrie's works were beaten at the issue of *Sentimental Tommy*, for within twelve months it passed its forty-third thousand. And surveying the two books retrospectively we must regard them as vital, the key-books, indeed, in Barrie's literary life.

The story opens in *Sentimental Tommy* with the boy and his mother living in a very poor district of London. The mother's name is Jean Myles, for she has retained her maiden title. Tom is a precocious youngster, a very successful creation. When his mother dies he and his small sister Elspeth are entrusted to the care of their mother's old lover in Thrums, Aaron Latta, from whose side Jean Myles had been lured by a fascinating blackguard who marries her and leaves her penniless in London. Latta dislikes Tommy, but lavishes much affection on Elspeth, a sweet, kindly and clinging girl who eventually becomes too habitually dependent on others, as do so many of her type.

Tommy is sent to school. It is a delightfully pictured place that is to have its replica in one of Barrie's happiest plays, *Quality Street*. Miss Ailie and Miss Kitty manage it. They belong to the crinoline period, and their school is known as 'The Hanky School' because a rigid rule is that each scholar shall bring a handkerchief, not, however, for the small nose's sake, but to kneel

on. While at a later school Tommy misses a prize because he took forty minutes to find the proper word in an essay. In this slight but character-revealing incident we find our solitary reminder that Barrie once told Stevenson of his intention to bear him in mind while he was writing *Sentimental Tommy*, especially the 'R.L.S.' who had a passion for the *mot propre*. Nor is there anything in the second half of the story, that of *Tommy and Grizel*, to lead the reader to believe that Tommy is in any way a portrait of Stevenson; and we fail to discover except in Tommy's philandering, the resemblance to Robert Burns that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch appears to have detected.

In the village of Thrums during Tommy's boyhood there dwells one who is known as 'The Painted Lady.' She had been driven crazy by a love whose fruit was an illegitimate child named Grizel. The boys fling stones at Grizel. Tommy defends her. Thus he becomes acquainted with the beautiful, courageous, truth-loving girl who was to prove a deep influence in his career. Tommy does not lose sight of her when he returns to London, his mission being that of quite a number of Barrie's heroes, to earn fame and fortune. His struggle in literature is a hard one, but eventually success comes to him. Meanwhile, he has visited Thrums and made love to Grizel. But she is not deceived about the nature of his attachment. He is merely a philanderer. Whatever genuine feeling is in his regard for her it is akin to that which he possesses for his sister

Elsbeth. He still preens himself for a hero, and struts about, mentally, as he did when he was a boy in years. 'Oh, that we were boys and girls all our lives,' he exclaims. Again and again their love comes to grief; it is Grizel alone who averts disaster.

Tommy goes south again, and Grizel learns that he is gravely ill in Switzerland. She makes a heroic journey across the continent to him, only to discover that he is making a philanderer's love to a married woman. The discovery comes to her at a time of high stress and strain, and causes a breakdown similar to that of her unfortunate mother. Remorsefully Tommy follows her back to Thrums. For eighteen months he remains near the demented girl – incidentally, as we are told in a very satirical way, London forgets its absent favourite – and nurses her back to sanity. But he is still 'sentimental' Tommy. He discovers that the lady with whom he had philandered in Switzerland has arrived in the Thrums neighbourhood, and while making a visit to her he climbs over a gate and, missing his foothold, falls in such a manner that he is strangled.

Tommy's death is the most masterly contrivance of the story. It was apparently intended at first that he should die of consumption – 'for Tommy had inherited his mother's cough,' we are informed earlier in *Tommy and Grizel*. But the idea of the boy who wouldn't grow up is sufficiently fixed in the author's mind to persuade him that just

as Tommy has lived boyishly so he must die boyishly. 'Poor Tommy! he was still a boy, he was ever a boy, trying sometimes, as now, to be a man, and always when he looked round he ran back to his boyhood as if he saw it holding out its arms to him and inviting him to come back and play. He was so fond of being a boy that he could not grow up. In a younger world, where there were only boys and girls, he might have been a gallant figure.'

The portrait is wholly consistent, and the attitude of the creative artist everywhere to the human side of existence is significantly revealed. Art is his first love. All else, even the love of woman, is subservient. Naïvely Tommy informs Grizel, who is passionately and humanly in love with him, that he is always ready to fly away and only comes to earth that he may fly again. Grizel's attempt to fulfil her declared mission of 'plucking out his feathers' one by one, thus making a true man of him, is doomed to failure, as it must be in the case of every artist who is true to his art. There is a moving passage in which Tommy begs Grizel to wish luck to the manuscript of his best book. 'You were always so fond of babies, and this is my baby,' he says. So 'Grizel kissed Tommy's baby, and then she turned away her face.'

*Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel* are written in a racy, droll, and whimsical style that is richer, less prone to thinness, than it has appeared to be in certain of his previous works.

But his difficulty with the descriptive and analytical substance of a novel remains. His strength is patently that of one who records moving incident and dialogue. And in this respect the two books are the most fertile of his prose-works even to this day. Barrie invented something new in literature thereby. His humour is that of an English Gogol, just as later on he might fairly have laid claim to be regarded the Mozart of literature in his imaginings. It is Puck-like, romantic humour, sweet with the strength of those who come through the fires of experience stronger and unembittered, a humour deeper than all else, because it holds all.

His later writings are, as it were, born in these two books. But the novels about Tommy obviously cost much effort. Far better, one can imagine him saying in the midst of his ordeal, to concentrate on an art-form in which analysis and description are reduced to the absolute minimum! As a matter of fact it is reasonable to suppose that at the completion of *Tommy and Grizel* he resolved to devote himself mainly to the theatre for the future. In this regard the preface to *Alice Sit-By-The-Fire* contains a significant passage:

‘ . . . In a play we must tell nothing that is not revealed by the spoken word; you must find out all you want to know from it; there is no weather even in plays nowadays except in melodrama; the novelist can have sixteen chapters about the hero’s grandparents, but we cannot

even say he had any unless he says it himself. There can be no rummaging in the past for us to show what sort of people our characters are; we are allowed only to present them as they toe the mark; then the handkerchief falls, and off they go.'

Who but Barrie could have applied the topsy-turvy method so convincingly that the reader believes the novelist and not the dramatist has the easier task!



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Flesh-pots of Egypt?

\*

I

. . . AND then he left us for the flesh-pots of Egypt.' In a great chorus, swelling up as it were from an imaginary wailing-wall that stretched all round the earth, the dolorous reproach of a million Scotsmen, unwarranted though it eventually proved, has celebrated the parting of the ways. It was apparent by the end of the century that Barrie was not to remain the monopoly of Scotland. Soon would he belong to the world. Vain, wholly vain, were the attempts to retain him. Some worthy Scots, realising that his decoy was the theatre – and how thoroughly justified their stern forefathers seemed now in their dark frown upon that institution! – even tried the arts of discouragement. One eulogist of the novels sent Barrie an appeal through the medium of his book, in which he wrote: 'As an old student of the acted drama I have no compunction in expressing the opinion that, despite the wonderful success of *The Little Minister* on the stage, Mr. Barrie is not, and is not likely to be, a serious factor in the contemporary drama.' And the clannish Highlanders, whose secret pride of possession had been intense, refused to be satisfied with a half share of him – nay, not even his scourgers, those who were for ever finding fault with him, and had done so just recently because in their view *The Little Minister* held up the simple faith of his people and their church to the ignorant

ridicule of the Sassenach. Echoes of that cry of loss and reproach still reverberate in the heart of Midlothian after a quarter of a century — and, ironically, in the hearts of those who also crossed the Border to the aforesaid flesh-pots. Robertson Nicoll, in a history of literature published during 1906, betrays a revulsion of feeling by accusing or allowing his collaborator in that work to accuse Barrie of 'insincerity' in his new phase. Another Scottish critic has written: 'If only Barrie had remained a Scottish dramatist, what a masterpiece might he not have hewn from his native granite!' And he goes on to speak of 'the real and the great Barrie, on whom the English and the fairies have made such fatal incursions. . . . Barrie is that oddity, a Scot beaten by the English, who have destroyed his chance to be the great comic dramatist of his country.'

But the Fates are all for internationalism in art, whether we approve of their politics or not — although this is not to say that Barrie had necessarily to make his farewell as an artist to Kirriemuir and the North. His books began to be translated into many languages and his plays soon appeared in many countries. His widened vogue had an amusing illustration in 1920, when an extraordinary discussion arose in Paris on the correct pronunciation of 'Crichton,' for *The Admirable Crichton* had just been produced at the Théâtre Antoine. Either 'Creeton,' 'Crikton' or 'Crishton' was on every Frenchman's tongue. . . .

## II

The abysmal folly of War, by which the world is degraded, does not leave art and the artist unaffected. And circling the close of the old century and the commencement of the new were several lean years for J. M. Barrie that coincide with the outbreak of strife in South Africa. On September 27, 1900, however, the three-act drama *The Wedding Guest*, was produced by Mr. Arthur Bouchier at the Garrick Theatre. In the same year the text was printed as a December supplement in the *Fortnightly Review*, and from it we gather that the wedding guest is a young man's 'past,' that arrives at his marriage in the highly compromising form of his mistress who is the mother of his child. The superseded woman faints and staggers away from the wedding. But the husband, a man with a conscience, has observed her, and he blurts out a full confession to his bride, thereby ruining his marriage and well-nigh breaking his wife's heart. This grim and realistic work pleased critics such as Mr. Archer. 'Hitherto, Mr. Barrie has only trifled with the stage,' he wrote, 'but now we can offer a very sincere welcome to our new dramatist.' Seemingly the Ibsenish maw would not be satisfied until it had swallowed everything, even the dramatist who had already shown clearly that he was bound for another destiny altogether. Seldom indeed were Barrie's plays to be 'stocked with the

drugs of seedy problems,' as John Millington Synge said of certain other twentieth century plays in the magnificent statement of an artist's faith that he set forth at the beginning of *The Playboy of the Western World*, and *The Wedding Guest* is merely one of the exceptions. In the year 1902, Barrie's star blazed up again with a sudden brilliance that was all the more effective for his lapse, greater even than that of the period when it dazzled the heavens with his novels, tales, and sketches. *Quality Street* was produced on September 17, at the Vaudeville Theatre, and *The Admirable Crichton* on the fourth of November at the Duke of York's Theatre. Miss Ellaline Terriss, Miss Marion Terry, and Mr. Seymour Hicks figured in the cast of *Quality Street*, and Miss Irene Vanbrugh and Mr. H. B. Irving were the principals of *The Admirable Crichton*. In each case Barrie was blessed with the perfect interpretation; and, consequently, when another play, *Little Mary*, was produced twelve months later (on September 24, 1903), at Wyndham's, *Quality Street* and *The Admirable Crichton* were still being performed. The careers of only very few dramatists have had the landmark of such an experience in their own lifetime. There was Oscar Wilde, and, later, Mr. Shaw, and later still, Mr. Somerset Maugham. Barrie was soon to accomplish some emphatic record-breaking on his own account, but so far he had to be content to equal the records of others.

## III

'A Dickens could never have been expected. He must come as a surprise. He is too big to dream about,' declared Barrie in one of his long ago literary studies, and in these three plays he also has shown the unevenness, the spontaneity, and incalculableness of genius. *Quality Street* is an example: this four-act comedy still unfolds as a surprise. Not since *Cranford* has our laven-dered literature produced a more exquisite store. Like Mrs. Gaskell's novel it is now a unique classic. In the Barrie topography it has been cleverly placed by the late Dixon Scott as just off the Great North Road, 'half-way between Thrums and Kensington Gardens.' There are, of course, many echoes of the early idylls in this pastiche of humour and pathos, romance and mystery, set in Napoleonic times. The roguish young womanhood of Phoebe of the Ringlets is that of Babby of *The Little Minister* over again, and reminiscent of *Sentimental Tommy*, and Miss Ailie's academy is this little scene in the school-room:

'PHOEBE (*who is sometimes at the spinet and sometimes dancing*): Toes out. So. Chest out, Georgy. Point your toes, Miss Beveridge—so. So—keep in line; and young ladies, remember your toes. (*Georgy in his desire to please has protruded the wrong part of his person. She writes a C on his chest with chalk*). C stands for chest, Georgy. This is S.'

Georgy is the first of many youngsters who, following the lately regretted Tommy, are to dance across the modern stage at Barrie's behest. Several of them dance in the same play, moreover. There is Arthur, for example, who is the lineal successor to the young hero of *Views of a Schoolboy*, contributed by Barrie to the *St. James's Gazette* in the 'eighties. He is also a close relation of 'Primus' in *My Lady Nicotine*. In one scene of *Quality Street*, when the sisters Susan and Phoebe Throssel, two gentlewomen faced with poverty, are obliged to set up a school and pursue an avocation for which they are deliciously unfitted, Arthur even takes our full attention for an instant, and helps considerably in setting the stage:

'PHOEBE. Say you are sorry, Arthur, and I won't punish you.

*(He bursts into tears.)*

'ARTHUR. You promised to cane me, and now you are not going to do it.

'PHOEBE *(incredulous)*. Do you *wish* to be caned?

'ARTHUR *(holding out his hand eagerly)*. If you please, Miss Phoebe.

'PHOEBE. Unnatural boy. *(She canes him in a very unprofessional manner)*. Poor dear boy. *(She kisses the hand)*.

'ARTHUR *(gloomily)*. Oh, ma'am, you will never be able to cane if you hold it like that. You should hold it like this, Miss Phoebe, and give it a wriggle like that.

*(She is too soft-hearted to follow his instructions.)*

'PHOEBE *(almost in tears)*. Go away.

'ARTHUR (*remembering that women are strange*). Don't cry, ma'am: I love you, Miss Phoebe.

(*She seats him on her knee, and he thinks of a way to please her*). If any boy says you can't cane I will blood him.

(PHOEBE *shudders, and* MISS SUSAN *again darts in. She signs to* PHOEBE *to send* ARTHUR *away*).

'MISS SUSAN (*as soon as Arthur has gone*). Phoebe, if a herring and a half cost three ha'pence, how many for elevenpence?

'PHOEBE (*instantly*). Eleven.

'MISS SUSAN. William Smith says it is fifteen; and he is such a big boy, do you think I ought to contradict him? No one can be sure. May I say there are differences of opinion about it? No one can be really sure, Phoebe.

'PHOEBE. It is eleven. I once worked it out with real herrings.'

#### IV

In *Quality Street* we are given an intimation of the faery immortality that, later on, rarefied the atmosphere of the theatre through *Peter Pan*, *Dear Brutus*, and *Mary Rose*. There is something uncanny about the niece of Susan and Phoebe Throssel, the lovely, lively Livvy who does not exist. And it is around Livvy that the play is really written. When Valentine Brown comes back from the wars and finds Phoebe looking 'not ten years older but twenty and not an easy twenty,' her sensitive nature detects

that he is shocked and disappointed by the change. Something deeper than the freakishness which is in all Barrie's heroines leads her to persuade him of the existence of a niece who is as young and pretty as she had been before he went away:

'MISS SUSAN. Phoebe, how can you be so cruel?

'PHOEBE. Because he has taken from her the one great glory that is in a woman's life. Not a man's love — she can do without that — but her own dear, sweet love for him.'

Here, for the first time, we have the wistful turning-back to the far country of lost dreams and good memories that Barrie has taught the world to think of so wistfully as the 'Never-Never Land.' From now onwards its discoverer goes from strength to strength. An extraordinary confidence comes into his writing, and never does he lose it. The introduction to *Quality Street* is uncommonly interesting, for it is the earliest of a series by which he conveys his stage-directions, his plays in consequence being as individual on the printed page as they are to witness in the playhouse. We are invited straightway into the blue and white room, (what matters it if we have been there before in *Sentimental Tommy*?): Miss Susan is playing hostess to 'four dear ladies, so refined that we ought not to be discussing them without a more formal introduction. There seems no sufficient reason why we should choose Miss Phoebe as our heroine rather than any of the others, except, perhaps, that we like her name



best.' But when Phoebe eventually enters 'we see at once that she really is the nicest.'

## V

If Shakespeare had been a twentieth century dramatist he might have written a play of the type of *The Admirable Crichton*. It is the outcome of a Shakespearian mood, the mood that was Mr. Hardy's when he wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Crichton is a great figure, and since the year 1902 it has been instinctive for us to recall Barrie's creation when we think of the title instead of its original possessor, who was James Crichton, born in Barrie's country during the sixteenth century, and whose learning was so marvellous and varied that he was master of twelve languages before he was eighteen years old, wrote poems in Latin, travelled abroad, enlisted in the French Army, debated in public for four days with the faculty of the Padua University on the philosophy of Aristotle, and then, at the age of twenty-two, lost all his learning, and his life too, in a paltry street brawl.

*The Admirable Crichton* opens at Loam House, Mayfair, on the particular day in the month when Lord Loam, a Radical peer, compels his servants to be his equals for afternoon tea only. Crichton, the servant who by becoming a butler at thirty has apparently realised his proudest ambition, deploras the institution not merely because after a previous gathering, the page-

boy in a burst of equality called him Crichton, and was dismissed, but because 'my lady, I am the son of a butler and a lady's maid — perhaps the happiest of all combinations, and to me the most beautiful thing in the world is a haughty, aristocratic English house, with every one kept in his place.' But he admits that circumstances may alter cases. If, for instance, everybody returned to Nature, a situation that Lord Loam is fond of contemplating, 'the same person might not be the master, the same persons might not be servants.'

Crichton accompanies the family on a yachting expedition. There is also Tweeny, who had risen from the position of 'between-maid' to lady's maid, owing to the influential Crichton having 'cast a favourable eye' on her. The author's skill in focussing the attention of his audience on a minor character for exactly the right space of time is again shown admirably during the interview which Lady Mary gives Crichton on the subject of Tweeny's promotion:

'LADY MARY. But I am afraid, Crichton, she will not suit us.

'CRICHTON. My lady, beneath this simple exterior are concealed a very sweet nature and rare womanly gifts.

'AGATHA. Unfortunately that is not what we want.

'CRICHTON. And it is she, my lady, who dresses the hair of the ladies' maids for our evening meals.

*(The ladies are interested at last).*

'LADY MARY. She dresses Fisher's hair?

'TWEENY. Yes, my lady, and I does them up when they goes to parties.

'CRICHTON (*pained but not scolding*). *Does!*

'TWEENY. Doos. And it's me what alters your gowns to fit them.

'CRICHTON. *What* alters!

'TWEENY. Which alters.

'AGATHA. Mary?

'LADY MARY. I shall certainly have her.'

When we learn in Act Two that the family are wrecked on an island in the Pacific we have occasion to recall Crichton's words about circumstances altering cases. For in the emergency, the butler proves himself leader of his lordship and his lordship's party. He takes charge of the daily life of the island, eventually becoming the honoured betrothed of Lady Mary. Circumstances have altered the case with a vengeance. The social order of England is reversed.

'CRICHTON. I am lord over all. They are but hewers of wood and drawers of water for me. These shores are mine. Why should I hesitate: I have no longer any doubt. I do believe I am doing the right thing. Dear Polly, I have grown to love you; are you afraid to mate with me? (*She rocks her arms: no words will come from her*).

I was a king in Babylon,  
And you were a Christian slave.

LADY MARY (*bewitched*). You are the most

wonderful man I have ever known, and I am not afraid.'

And then, with a second wave of the magic wand, the original position is restored. The castaways are rescued, and at once Crichton is the servile butler again.

## VI

It has been said that *Quality Street* was a *cul-de-sac* and that Barrie had taken himself nowhere. The remark may more usefully be applied to *The Admirable Crichton*, for it was Barrie's solitary excursion into Nietzscheanism, although we find evidence of a contemplated visit in *What Every Woman Knows*. The conception of *The Admirable Crichton* is romantic enough, but the thought behind it is hardly that of an artist. Rather is it the thought of the thinker who preached the gospel of the super-man, and it has not been as imaginatively translated into terms of art as we expected. Nevertheless, the will to power has seldom had a finer exposition, not even in the writings of Mr. Bernard Shaw, and we recognise with a clearness which no mere treatise can impart that the true democracy and the true aristocracy are the same thing. The sham democracy of Lord Loam with his monthly tea-party at which his own family and the domestic staff are equals for a puerile hour is mercilessly satirised; but Barrie does not forget that tragedy underlies this sham democracy. For when the positions are once more as they had been at the beginning, the dignity of the butler

is a thing of such pathos that we shrink from the spectacle of his defeated majesty. Lord Loam addresses him again as just Crichton. Not really defeated, though: he ceases to be an erect figure and takes on the humble bearing of a servant again, but he renounces Lady Mary with 'the speech of his life.' 'My lady,' he says; that is all. He is still lord over all. Those members of the audience who see no farther than the humiliation have the consolation of knowing that Crichton still has his Tweeny, forerunner and successor of many little Barrie heroines, courageous and cheery as a sparrow. 'I'm full o' vulgar words and ways,' she exclaims in a despairing Freudian outburst; 'and though I may keep them in their holes when you are by, as soon as I'm by myself out they comes in a rush like beetles when the house is dark. I says them gloating-like, in my head—Blooming, I says, and All my eye, and Ginger, and Nothink; and all the time we was being wrecked I was praying to myself, Please the Lord it may be on an island as it's natural to be vulgar on.' There has been much speculation about the future of Crichton and Tweeny. Barrie once hinted (in a letter read during the first night of a revival in 1919) that they settled down in a small 'pub' in the Harrow Road. This, as A. B. Walkley said, 'struck the perfect note, the final note of irony.' But in the film version of the play its final scene discovers Crichton and Tweeny living happily ever after on a farm in the far West. We may take our choice as we please.

Tweeny is the ragged little London drudge who appears with a different name in *A Kiss for Cinderella*. There, however, life ebbs low for her. 'There is no light save the tiniest glow, which has been shining on the floor all the time, unregarded by us. . . . Very little life left in her, very little oil left in the lantern.'

## VII

*Little Mary* was uproariously received; Moira's mysterious and reiterated reference to the stomach as 'Little Mary' was quickly taken up by the British public, who were grateful for the opportunity thus given them to refer openly to what hitherto had been taboo as a topic of conversation. Barrie has not often lapsed into vulgarity, but all one remembers of *Little Mary* is that it offers a melancholy instance. There is the sniggering politeness of the boudoir about it. That the author was wholly unconscious of the lapse is proved by another infelicity, perpetrated during the same period and elsewhere than in the play. It occurs in a passage in *The Little White Bird*, a prose fantasy that was published in 1902 by Hodder and Stoughton, the last of his prose-works with one substantial exception. The passage has been widely quoted and approved as an example of 'poetic' writing:—

'He made a pipe of reeds, and he used to sit by the shore of the island of an evening, practising the sigh of the wind and the ripple of the water,

and catching handfuls of the shine of the moon, and he put them all in his pipe and played them so beautifully that even the birds were deceived, and they would say to each other, "Was that a fish leaping in the water, or was it Peter playing leaping fish on his pipe?" And sometimes he played the birth of birds, and then the mothers would turn round in their nests to see whether they had laid an egg. If you are a child of the Gardens you must know the chestnut tree near the bridge, which comes out in flower first of all the chestnuts, but perhaps you have not heard why this tree leads the way. It is because Peter wearies for summer and plays that it has come, and the chestnut being so near, hears him and is cheated.'

## VIII

In *Little Mary* an Irish chemist realises that the English people suffer from too much eating. He prophesies for them an awful doom unless their ways are mended. He invents a new Golden Rule, which he calls Home Rule for England: 'One Day, One Dinner.' Barrie appears to have regarded the theatre not only as a place for the presentation of the best of what Shelley called midsummer tasks, but as a sort of alternative repository to the magazines of his younger days for his journalism. In all he has written nearly forty plays, and of these a majority must be passed over quickly as 'pot-boilers' (more or less) when their moments arise.

Substantial pot-boilers, some of them, like *Half-an-Hour*, a *tour-de-force* of craftsmanship; but others, like *Rosy Rapture*, *the Pride of the Beauty Chorus*, and *Der Tag*, were merely written for occasions created by the Great War. It is in these, if anywhere, that the author exposes himself to the charge so often and usually so wrongly and irresponsibly preferred against him — that of being a sentimentalist. No man is a sentimentalist unless he is not truly himself.



## CHAPTER NINE

'Except Ye Become as Little Children . . .'

★

I

Soon after his triple success with *Quality Street*, *The Admirable Crichton*, and *Little Mary*, Barrie agreed to write a new play for Charles Frohman, and eventually sent word to the producer that if he joined him at dinner at the Garrick Club, London, there would be news of it. Frohman's son has described that meeting. Barrie seemed nervous and hesitant. He had finished the play, he said, in accordance with his promise, and Frohman could have it at once, although he feared that it would not be a commercial success. 'But it is a dream-child of mine, and I am anxious to see it on the stage.' Whereupon he named another play that he had written, and proposed a bargain. If Frohman would produce the 'uncommercial' play, he could produce the second one also, which was sure to compensate him for the inevitable losses. If it did not, added Barrie, he would make up the financial deficiency himself.

The play that Barrie had qualms about is *Peter Pan*, or, *The Boy who Wouldn't Grow Up*. The play in which he placed his confidence was *Alice Sit-By-the-Fire*. Both were produced almost immediately, *Peter Pan* on December 27th, 1904, at the Duke of York's Theatre, and *Alice* on April 5th, 1905, also at the Duke of York's. Despite that the cast of the latter play included Miss Ellen Terry (as Alice Grey), Miss Irene Vanbrugh, and Mr. Aubrey Smith, it was a comparative failure,

its chief success being made in New York. *Peter Pan*, on the other hand, was so wonderfully successful in London that Barrie has created a world's record through it, a record that Shakespeare himself has not challenged. Following on its Christmas season in the winter of 1904, and after being produced in New York and running for eight months in 1905, the play was revived the following Christmas, and has since been revived in London every winter.

An American critic wrote of *Peter Pan*: 'This is no spring flower, or hothouse plant, it is a hardy perennial, and will delight thousands of spectators after we shall have all made our exit from the planet. It is one of the most profound, original, and universal plays of our epoch. No London Christmas would be complete without it. It is just as appealing in 1920 as it was in 1904, and there is no reason why it should not produce the same effect in 2020. It is the rapture of children, the joy of old age; and it ought to take its place with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Pied Piper* story, *Alice in Wonderland*.' The prophetic note has not been falsified, and Barrie may be regarded as the Hans Andersen of the stage. The text of *Peter Pan* is now translated into nearly every civilised language and produced in the theatres of almost every civilised country. Young actresses count it an uncommon distinction if they should be chosen to play the part of Peter. The names of those who have done so in London are immortalised thereby. They are Nina Bouci-

cault, Cissie Loftus, Pauline Chase (who refused to grow up for eight successive years), Madge Titheradge, Unity Moore, Fay Compton, Faith Celli, Georgette Cohan, Edna Best, Joan Maclean, Gladys Cooper, and Dorothy Dickson. The children who have adored the play are also immortalised, for Barrie has erected a statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens as his gift to them. The gift came as a delightful surprise for the little Londoners who have spent their days in the Gardens. Set up by stealth in the night, it was revealed to them on a May-day morning.

## II

The origins of *Peter Pan* are to be found in two of Barrie's prose-books, *Tommy and Grizel* and *The Little White Bird*. Reference is made in *Tommy and Grizel* to a new work by 'T. Sandys,' 'a reverie about a little boy who was lost. His parents find him in a wood singing joyfully to himself because he thinks he can now be a boy for ever; and he fears that if they catch him they will compel him to grow into a man, so he runs farther from them into the wood and is running still, singing to himself because he is always to be a boy.' And in *The Little White Bird*, that was published in 1902, there are six chapters that have since been extracted and made into a separate work entitled *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

*The Little White Bird* is a pastiche of old love and young marriage, a fantasy of fairies, birds,

bachelors. . . . The scene-transforming machinery which was to be employed successfully in several of the plays is brought into perfect action in the book also, immediately we have been introduced to the father of six-years-old David (the author speaks in the first person as the father) and to the young mother, Mary A —, from whom the man is divided and for whom David acts as a go-between except when she endeavours to bridge the division herself, as on one pathetic occasion she did vainly. 'She asked would I tell her the time, please, just as children ask, and forget as they run back with it to their nurse. But I was prepared even for this, and raising my hat I pointed with my staff to a clock in the distance.' (Carlyle pointing to the milestone!) . . . In *The Little White Bird* it becomes necessary for the purposes of the story that the reader should be taken to the days before the lives of Mary A — and the tale-teller were put asunder; consequently, the machinery is put in motion: —

'“We are going away back, David, to see your mother as she was in the days before there was you.” He hailed a hansom. “Drive back six years,” I said to the cabby, “and stop at the Junior Old Fogies’ Club.”

'He was a stupid fellow, and I had to guide him with my umbrella.

'The streets were not quite as they had been in the morning. For instance, the book-shop at the corner was now selling fish. . . . You can't think how little David looked as we entered the

portals of the club. . . . As I enter the club smoking-room you are to conceive David vanishing into nothingness, and that it is any day six years ago at two in the afternoon.'

The effect created by that uncanny transition is similar to the effect that Dickens created when he whimsically recalled a journey along the road to Canterbury during which he encountered, near Gad's Hill, a vision of his former self, a 'very queer small boy, drawing a low breath, and now staring at the house out of window with all his might,' just as he had done when he was a small boy himself. Later in Barrie's 'queer' book, so powerfully redeemed from literary sentimentalism by the author's devotion to the boy David, as *Margaret Ogilvy* was redeemed by the sincerity of his feeling towards his vanished mother, something very important occurs. But not before we have fallen into a mood of utter receptiveness and are prepared to accept whatever exquisite fancy Barrie may offer:—

'If you leave your empty perambulator under the trees and watch from a distance, you will see the birds boarding it and hopping about from pillow to blanket in a twitter of excitement; they are trying to find out how babyhood would suit them.

'Quite the prettiest sight in the Gardens is when the babies stray from the tree where the nurse is sitting and are seen feeding the birds, not a grown-up near them. It is first a bit to me then a bit to you, and all the time such a jabbering

and laughing from both sides of the railing. They are comparing notes and inquiring for old friends, and so on; but what they say I cannot determine, for when I approach they all fly away.'

At the thirteenth chapter we encounter the most exquisite fancy of all. In other words, we are introduced to Peter Pan, who 'is ever so old, but he is really always the same age, so that does not matter in the least. His age is one week, and though he was born so long ago he has never had a birthday, nor is there the slightest chance of his ever having one. The reason is that he escaped from being a human when he was seven days old; he escaped by the window and flew back to the Kensington Gardens.'

### III

Probably the readers of *The Little White Bird* imagined that they had said good-bye to Peter for good when he disappears at the end of the eighteenth chapter. But someone – the fairies, maybe – had decreed otherwise. It happened that while *The Little White Bird* was being written Barrie lived at Leinster Gardens, almost directly opposite to the gate in the world-famous map at which the old lady stands with her balloons, and – well, let us listen while one who knows the whole story re-tells what happened: –

'Back in the dark ages – which is another way of saying twenty-five years ago – a small man with a black moustache was walking through Kensington

Gardens in London. It was a cheerful day. The fog and smoke were completely routed by a breeze that carried the scent of lilac blossoms. The small man with the moustache stopped on one of the paths in the park and looked enviously at five diminutive brothers playing solemnly on the grass—a small family, of the kind that Barrie wrote about in his delightful introduction to *The Young Visitors*, who “invented their own games, dodged their governess, and let the rest of the world go hang.”

‘The five boys, after a moment, saw him. Despite his moustache the small man looked like a friendly grown-up and so they invited him to play with them. This he did. He invented a number of rather exciting games. And the six of them played together until the shadows began to lengthen across the park and something told them that it was time to go home to tea. To their mutual surprise he and the boys discovered that they were next-door neighbours. They were the children of Mr. and Mrs. Llewellyn Davies, and closely related to Mr. Gerald du Maurier, the actor. One of the boys, it should be written at this point, was named Peter.

‘Gradually the grown-up playmate of the five boys became increasingly important in their lives. And when, later on, a tragedy occurred which they did not clearly understand, the playmate of five orphaned children became a closer playmate still. . . . One day they had heard that he was very famous. Then they heard another thing: he

had written a play and called it, first, *The Great White Father*, and then altered the name to *Peter Pan*.

'They demanded to know all about it. He complied. They recognised it at once. Indeed they were in it: so, it is said, was Margaret, the tiny daughter of W. E. Henley, who had tried to call her father's friend "Friendly," but only succeeded in saying "Wendy." He even confessed that they were part authors, and indeed one of them had made a joke which he had thought good enough to be introduced into his play, and he promised to pay the boy a farthing royalty on every performance.'

## IV

*Peter Pan* had begun as a nursery tale for these five children. At first Barrie simply narrated the chapters that were included in *The Little White Bird*, and which, when re-issued as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, were dedicated to 'Sylvia and Arthur Llewellyn Davies and their boys (my boys).' But they had been insistent in their demand for 'more,' and as he himself has said, it became 'the longest story in the world.' In it were wonderful pictures and thrilling climaxes, in reality just a reflection of those children's minds. There were pirates and fairies and flying boys and girls, and a crocodile that went tick-tock because it had swallowed a watch, and because it had swallowed a pirate's arm also that crocodile



followed the pirate all round the world for the other arm. All was true to life as a young child sees it. And when one pirate was killed the listening small Peter of the five brothers excitedly cried: 'One isn't enough; let's kill a lot of them.'

The play that was constructed with superlative economy out of 'the longest story in the world' appeared eventually on the stage. It proved a huge success, although the author's satisfaction threatened to be marred because the original of Peter was unfortunately ill in bed that Christmas. The boy was heartbroken because he would not be able to see it. Barrie told Frohman about the illness. Straightway Frohman vowed that 'if the boy can't come to the play we'll take the play to the boy.' And they did; he sent his company with as much scenery as might be squeezed into the boy's bedroom.

## V

It is not necessary to say that *Peter Pan* has for more than twenty years been the delight of all who have seen its performance. To-day a generation of children are being taken to the theatre by elders who were made happy by the play when they were children. Two of those five boys who had that happiness in a very special way are no longer here to recall it. They have died heroically, one of them in the War, the other on the south coast of England as he attempted to save someone from drowning. Charles Frohman has passed away

also. Frohman was travelling across the Atlantic on the ill-fated *Lusitania* when the ship was torpedoed by belligerent submarines. In his last moments the same thought came to him that was expressed by Peter Pan in the play he knew so well, and so loved. Survivors have recorded that he said to a companion as they fastened lifebelts on them: 'To die will be an awfully big adventure. . . .'

## VI

The play of *Peter Pan* is retold as a prose narrative in *Peter and Wendy*, published in 1911. Previously, in *The Little Minister*, we have seen how a story is made into a play, and now we see how a master-craftsman reverses the process. The opening paragraph strikes the requisite note: —

'All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old, she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, "Oh, why can't you remain like this for ever!" This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.'

Then, in a prose narrative that only Barrie could have written, and which is perfectly in keeping

with the spirit of the play, we have the story that was so well known already. Through the open nursery window in which Mr. and Mrs. Darling's three children are sleeping, the motherless Peter Pan comes flying. Wendy, John, and Michael have a very comfortable home, with a Newfoundland dog for nurse, that can turn taps on and off, warm the children's night-clothes, and see that they take their proper medicine. But they do not need much persuading to go off with Peter to the Never-Never land. Poor Peter is a little wistful because he has lost his shadow – at once when the Darling children hear of this they are glad of theirs, and so are the audience of theirs, for when *Peter Pan* is being played all the audience are children. It might be supposed that, being able to fly, Peter had his compensation: but no, for, as he explains, anybody can fly who has faith.

The Never-Never land is populated by all the world's lost children, those whom the careless nurses have allowed to tumble out of the perambulators, and those who have strayed away from the garden gate and never found the way back. There are also some glorious twopenny coloured savages; a pirate schooner skippered by Captain Hook; wolves that run away from anybody who stoops to look back at them from between his legs; the crocodile, fairies, and pirates already mentioned; and a cottage with a silk top-hat for its smoking chimney. There are, moreover, several thrilling adventures and thrilling escapes. Peter somehow manages to find himself faced by

starvation; but he only expresses the thought that Frohman recalled as he stood on the sinking ship. Peter does not die, however; and, very happy, the children return to their nursery, there to be greeted by the lovely shining light that comes into a mother's eyes when she looks upon her own child.

The exquisite last curtain of the play is followed in the narrative by a conclusion that is in keeping with the opening paragraph, and ends the book on a dying fall:—

‘As you look at Wendy you may see her hair becoming white, and her figure little again, for all this happened long ago. Jane is now a common grown-up, with a daughter called Margaret; and every Spring-cleaning time, except when he forgets, Peter comes for Margaret and takes her to the Neverland, where she tells him stories about himself, to which he listens eagerly. When Margaret grows up she will have a daughter, who is to be Peter's mother in turn: and thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.’

Barrie has dramatised this conclusion in *Afterthought: or What Happened to Wendy*. Miss Hilda Trevelyan lately revealed that it was introduced into one performance of the play many years ago at the Duke of York's Theatre, between the nursery and the tree-top scenes. In the *Afterthought* are some boys who used to go to school on the top of an omnibus, and sometimes when the conductor came to collect their fares they would all fly off without paying. The manuscript of

the fragment is inscribed 'to Hilda Trevelyan, my incomparable Wendy, from J.M.B. March, 1908.'

## VII

*Peter Pan* appeared as a play at a time when the children's theatre was a stale place, and dismal with tedious so-called fairy-plays or pantomimes with red-nosed comedians and principal 'boys' of a type hardly credible twenty years later, and whose disappearance has been deplored only by the sentimentalists in club-bars or public-house tap-rooms dribbling their platitudes about the 'good old days' of the theatre which, having gone (as a French wit has said) will, thank God, never return. *Peter Pan* has been directly responsible for the disappearance of the old type of pantomime. It is also responsible for the disappearance of the old type of children's play. But *Peter Pan* is more than a poetical pantomime itself; it is a reincarnation of the universal Pan.

Barrie has supervised practically all the initial productions of his plays, and added or subtracted as the rehearsals went along. He did so in the instance of *Peter Pan* and the exclamation about death being a big adventure was only added at the time of its first revival. So were the lagoon scene, and the finale of the tree-tops, when Peter and Wendy are discovered among the leaves, and all about them the fairy lamps swing low as the curtain falls to their happy music as of many bells.

The tale of *Peter Pan and Wendy* has been retold by others as well as by the original author. New versions have been made of it for very small children by Mr. Daniel O'Connor (1908), by Mr. G. D. Drennan (1912), and by Miss May Byron (1923). Mr. John Hassall and Mr. Arthur Rackham have accomplished the more possible feat of enriching the original story with drawings and paintings. Also there has been a '*Peter Pan* Painting Book,' a '*Peter Pan* Keepsake,' and even a '*Peter Pan* Alphabet' (by Oliver Herford). But whose language can ultimately be an adequate substitute for Barrie's own? It is impossible to retell many of the chapters, especially that of '*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*,' the chapter in which Peter has his second wish, and wishes to go back to his mother 'for ever and always,' and the fairies let him, although when he reached the window it was closed and there were bars on it, 'and peeping inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm around another boy' — as much a usurper as Sentimental Tommy's little sister in the novel of ten years earlier:

'Peter called "Mother! Mother!" but she heard him not; in vain he beat his little limbs against the iron bars. He had to fly back, sobbing, to the Gardens, and he never saw his dear again. What a glorious boy he had meant to be to her! Ah, Peter! we who have made the great mistake, how differently we should all act at the second chance. But Solomon was right — there is no second chance, not for most of us. When we reach the

window it is Lock-out Time. The iron bars are up for life.'

For countless people, and the years are adding to their number, the possibility of J. M. Barrie becoming the great dramatist of Scottish life is joyfully sacrificed.

## CHAPTER TEN

### A Host of Plays, Major and Minor

\*

I

It is wholly in accordance with the nature of the genius whose artistic progress we have been observing that the idea of the Second Chance should have remained in his mind long after he had completed *The Little White Bird*.

For fifteen years it hovered there, quiet-winged, and out of it *Dear Brutus* gradually evolved. Before this three-act comedy was presented, many others were seen on the stage, the majority of which are to be regarded as Barrie's trivia. The first in order of production after *Peter Pan* was *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire, a Page from a Daughter's Diary*. It is a blend of satire, fantasy, drama, and comedy in which the author makes fun of man and woman in most of their seven ages, nor do the audience escape. They have pleasurably awaited that page from a daughter's diary, but, he asks, playfully yet serious, how can the secrets of Amy Grey be revealed? Surely they cannot. 'Is it because this would be a form of eavesdropping, and that we cannot be sure our hands are clean enough to turn the pages of a young girl's thoughts? It cannot be that, because the novelists do it.' Thus the play is a mockery of the novelists also.

The plot is modern, and based on various misunderstandings among the characters. We have Alice, the mother, trying to save her daughter; we have the daughter, 'stuffed to her pretty eye-



brows' with spurious romance, trying to save her mother; and there are also a mysterious step on the stairs, a dropped glove, and a cupboard. When the curtain falls, Alice Grey, the middle-aged but still charming woman, is left sitting by the fireside, meditating on the passing of her day as the queen of men's hearts:—

'It's summer done, autumn begun, farewell summer; we don't know you any more. My girl and I are like the little figures in the weather-house; when Amy comes out Alice goes in. Alice Sit-by-the-Fire henceforth. The moon is full to-night, Robert, but it isn't looking for me any more. Taxis, farewell! Advance, four-wheelers! I had a beautiful husband once, black as a raven was his hair. Pretty Robert, farewell! Farewell, Alice that was! It's all over, my dear. I always had a weakness for you, but now you must really go. Make way there for the old lady!'

In *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire* Barrie made his second attempt to present contemporary life fantastically for the theatre. *The Admirable Crichton* had been the first. *Alice* has none of the grave dignity of *Crichton*; instead it has a poignant vivacity. Nowhere is the odd, whimsical, sympathetic nature of Barrie's work brisker or fresher.

## II

'You may think *The Admirable Crichton* better than *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire*,' wrote William Archer.

'I hold the contrary opinion.' There can be no such difference of view about the next full-length play, *What Every Woman Knows*, which was preceded by Barrie's initial one-act pieces, *Josephine* and *Punch* (a toy tragedy) and *Pantaloon*, produced at the Duke of York's in 1905, the year that held for London playgoers Mr. Shaw's *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara*, and Mr. Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance*. *What Every Woman Knows* is not only one of its author's most original and artistically successful plays, with an opening act that gave opportunity for a flying return to his own country. It is much more. It definitely marks the third period in Barrie's theatrical career. We have seen how in his first period – and each period appears to have had its corresponding stage while he was mainly a novelist and story-teller – he was striving towards the necessary adjustment of actuality and art, and how, when he had made it, he was able to range his own world in utter freedom and completeness, fluttering like one of his own Ariel-fancies from one object to another, until at length, reaching his second period, he catches up the secret of happiness ('Except ye become as a little child . . .') and endeavours to teach it to the world through *Peter Pan*. He had been held by a beauty which subtly lingered with him and that lingers with us all, whether we share his secret or not, from the youngest of our days to the end, the beauty of the light that shines in many places, but most radiantly in the eyes of a mother. Henceforward

all the plays that are stamped with the mark of the genuine Barrie were to be suffused with that light. Even Maggie Wylie in *What Every Woman Knows*, a freakish and unmanageable lassie, without 'charm,' without lovers, becomes radiant with it. John Shand, a railway porter during the summer and a student at Glasgow University in winter, is discovered at midnight in her father's study. He has not come to burgle, but to gather knowledge; he reckons himself lucky, all the same, to escape with a promise that he will marry Maggie at the end of five years (if she still wants him to) in return for an annuity of three hundred a year while he completes his University course.

This all belongs to a first-act, so excellent that although the author may have equalled it — that of *Dear Brutus* can hardly be ranked lower — there is definitely none superior in all his writings. His joyous confidence in his workmanship as he wrote it is everywhere manifest. For example, when the curtain rises on old Wylie and his son playing a game of chess, not a word is spoken on the stage for more than five minutes. And the dialogue, true and bright and crisply significant, provides an object-lesson for those who believe that it is absolutely necessary to keep one's audience busily occupied with entrances and exits: —

'JOHN. Or take it the other way. Supposing as I got to know her I *could not* endure her?

'DAVID (*suavely*). You have both to take risks.

'JAMES (*less suavely*). What you need, John Shand, is a clout on the head.

'JOHN. Three hundred pounds is no great sum.

'DAVID. You can take it or leave it.

'ALICK. No great sum for a student studying for the ministry!

'JOHN. Do you think that with that amount of money I would stop short at being a minister?

'DAVID. That's how I like to hear you speak. A young Scotsman of your ability, let loose upon the world with three hundred pounds; what could he not do? It's almost appalling to think of; especially if he went among the English.

'JOHN. What do you think, Miss Maggie?

'MAGGIE (*who is knitting*). I have no thoughts on the subject, either way. . . .

'DAVID. Well, Mr. Shand?

'JOHN. I'm willing if she's willing.

'DAVID. Maggie?

'MAGGIE. There can be no "if" about it. It must be an offer. . . .

'JOHN (*reluctantly*). Miss Maggie, will you?

'MAGGIE (*doggedly*). Is it an offer?

'JOHN (*dourly*). Yes.

'MAGGIE (*rising*). Before I answer I want first to give you a chance of drawing back.

'DAVID. Maggie.

'MAGGIE (*bravely*). When they said that I have been run after, they were misleading you. I'm without charm; nobody has ever been after me.

'JOHN. Oh!

'ALICK. They will be yet.

'JOHN (*the innocent*). It shows at least that you haven't been after them.'

## III

How Maggie Shand rises to the occasion as a beautiful embodiment of mother-wife is beautifully portrayed. There is in the play a hint of despair, though, a mocking suggestion that man is but the puppet of lust, and that mother-love alone can redeem him, all else, even the love of wife, being powerless. 'I'll save him if I can, David, if I can,' Maggie says to her brother, when John is almost lost in the entangling net of another woman. But it is the mother in her that makes the resolution. And the mother is speaking when she retorts to David's question, 'Does he deserve to be saved after the way he had treated you?' 'You stupid David,' said Maggie, 'what has that to do with it?'

In *Rosalind*, produced at the Duke of York's on October 14th, 1912, we have the eternal mother again, this time in the rather cynical shape of an elderly actress who cures, by disillusionment and mercilessly at her own expense, the infatuation of a young Oxford man with 'a nice taste in the arts that has come to him by way of socks, spats and slips,' but portrayed as eventually capable of something better. *Rosalind* was preceded at the same theatre by *Old Friends*, *The Twelve Pound Look*, and *A Slice of Life* two years earlier. These one-act pieces are all to be ranked among Barrie's lesser work, the second-named not excepted. It is a mere anecdote about a wife

who inquires the price of a typewriter because she sees a way out through its aid of her unutterably tedious marital existence, but many people have taken it seriously. *The Adored One* (produced in New York as *The Legend of Leonora*) is remarkable for one reason only. It provided the author with his solitary experience of hearing his work hissed at the final curtain. The piece was first played on September 4th, 1913, and after a fortnight's performances Barrie rapidly re-wrote it, the new edition being staged three weeks later. Even then Barrie was not satisfied (nor were the public), and he introduced Leonora, the chief character, into a later play (New Theatre, 1917) entitled *Seven Women*, which exhibited her as the possessor of seven different personalities. *The Will*, another play belonging to 1913 (Duke of York's, September 4th) is more characteristic, although tentative. Barrie deals with its subject with a fine skill, and it moves with consummate ease from its poignant opening in a lawyer's office during the preparation of a very humble will by a young hopeful and his bride; through the scene of twenty years later, when the harsh and joyless revision of the will is made, and caused entirely by their more worldly-prosperous circumstances; and so to the final scene, after another twenty years, when the wife is dead and the husband knows not what to do with a stupendous wealth that has brought only estrangement and bitterness. Light sentiment darkens to pathos and irony; the economy of change in scene and personæ is superb.

## IV

*The Dramatists Get What They Want* is a harmless thunderbolt that fell in the same year. *The New Word*, presented with *Rosy Rapture*, *the Pride of the Beauty Chorus*, at the Duke of York's on March 22nd, 1915, considerably tantalised Barrie's admirers, as *Rosy Rapture* did also. This latter piece provided a setting for the snapdragon *gaminerie* of Gaby Deslys, the Parisian dancer. *The Truth about the Russian Dancers* (1919) left its audience with a similar impression to that created by those earlier pieces. Other work of the period included (rather later on) *Shall We Join the Ladies?*, a brilliant fragment first acted at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1920, and *Shakespeare's Legacy*, which was acted by Mr. Gerald du Maurier and Miss Lily Elsie at Drury Lane Theatre in 1916. The text was printed in a private edition by Clement Shorter during the same year, and again we have Barrie luxuriating in his master-workmanship: — "The scene is simply a man's room anywhere. It may be gorgeous or shabby; that matters not, nor do we mind whether door, window, or fire irons face north, south, east or west. . . ." How the precise dramatists whose stage directions are often the most important part of their work must have beaten their breasts and roared when they heard Barrie's chuckling laughter! . . . Then follows the first dialogue: —

WIFE (*looking round with delight*). At last! Home! Thomas, our own fireside!

'HUSBAND (*equally gay*). Allow me to introduce you. Mrs. Thomas Bantry — my old diggings: old diggings — your new mistress.

'WIFE. How do you do, dear diggings! I've just come back from such a delicious honeymoon. Do excuse me if you see lots of it still sticking to me.'

A trifle light as air, cast like a mere chip from a master's workshop; and yet never was play begun so effectively. Indeed Barrie revealed in that opening much more than his technical skill of making plain a situation in a sentence of dialogue. The audience surrenders immediately to his characters. Later on there is a finely contrasted dialogue between two phantom queens, seen through the mist of ages: —

'MARY. See, dear, how my eyelashes stick together. They part sleepily. Males love it so. I know not why. I gave up vindictiveness for that — and backbiting for this dimple. I see you dimple not.

'ELIZABETH. Rizzio, Darnley, Bothwell.

'MARY (*without rancour*). Now you grow personal.

'ELIZABETH. Sir Walter Scott, Andrew Lang, Maurice Hewlett.

'MARY. I blow them a kiss across the ages. Let Master Hewlett bear it to the others when he joins them in the Elysian fields.

'ELIZABETH. Can I do nothing to enrage thee, Mary?'

The playlet represents Barrie's one and only



contribution to the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy. Incidentally since it was written Maurice Hewlett has done his queen's bidding. . . . Shakespeare's 'legacy,' it appears, was a code, and only the women of our time have the wit to read it aright. When Barrie was enrolled as an honorary Freeman and honorary Liveryman of the Stationers' Company in 1925, side by side with the Earl of Balfour and Mr. Kipling, he made an amusing reference to this legacy. 'Shakespeare has heard that he is about to be understood at last. They say a look of expectancy has come over the face of his statue in Leicester Square.' He follows with a dark hint about 'a scrap of paper which proves conclusively that Bacon did not write the plays, and so far, good, but — and I get this from the Ladies' Shakespeare — Bacon was not the only author in that household. This document, as I am told and will soon know for certain, is signed by Shakespeare, and is in these words: "Received from Lady Bacon for fathering her play of Hamlet, Five pounds." . . . After all, that old Liveryman of this Company was probably the wise one who said to Ben Johnson, I think, "I know not, Sir, whether Bacon wrote the works of Shakespeare, but if he did not, it seems to me that he missed the opportunity of his life."'

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

'Our Two Chief Characters - Darkness and Light'

\*

I

ON a May day in 1909 J. M. Barrie made a journey to the home of George Meredith, at Box Hill, Dorking. His purpose has been explained in a booklet of sixteen pages that was published in a small edition soon afterwards by Constables, with whose firm Meredith's son, Mr. W. M. Meredith, is officially associated. 'All morning,' wrote Barrie, 'there had been a little gathering of people outside the house. It was the day on which Mr. Meredith was to be, as they say, buried. He had been, as they say, cremated. The funeral coach came, and a very small thing was placed in it and covered with flowers. One plant of the wallflower in the garden would have covered it. The coach, followed by a few others, took the road to Dorking, where, in familiar phrase, the funeral was to be, and in a moment or two all seemed silent and deserted, the cottage, the garden, and Box Hill.'

But, the little essay goes on, the cottage was not deserted. Soon 'They' had gathered round it in their turn, 'the mighty company, his children, Lucy and Clara and Rhoda and Diana and Rose and old Mel and Roy Richmond and Adrian and Sir Willoughby and a hundred others.' They were waiting for their king to come forth. 'Each of his proud women carried a flower, and the hands of all his men were ready for the salute.' In the room that held the armchair which had been to many

'the throne of letters in this country' that king was seated. When the last sound of the coaches had passed away he moved in his chair, 'for something was happening to him, and it was this, old age was falling from him.' And then his eyes were as an eagle's again, and his hair was no longer white, and youth was in his body. He flung open the door, as They knew he would do, and he stood looking at them, his beloved subjects. "They wore bright raiment: they were not sad like the mourners who had gone, but happy as the forget-me-nots and pansies at their feet and the lilac overhead, for they knew that this was his coronation day." It was a glorious morning, for he went swinging down the path, 'singing briskly and calling to his dogs . . . and there came to him somehow a knowledge (it was the last he was ever to know of little things) that people had been at variance as to whether a casket of dust should be laid away in one hole or another, and he flung back his head with the old glorious action, and laughed a laugh "broad as a thousand beeves at pasture." For he had seen the immortals awaiting him, as they await every great man when he dies, "at the top of the nearest hill. . . ."'

As the book concludes we are reminded that 'in the meanwhile an empty coach was rolling on to Dorking.'

## II

Criticism of the technical novelties which have inevitably been an accompaniment of Barrie's forty-

five years of work in two arts, from the time when he was a young and resolutely struggling journalist to the years of his highest achievement as author and playwright, will, one supposes, be for ever active. And criticism of the artistic vision that finds its interpretation in that work and gives it a wholly unique colouring, is less legitimate, but is likely to remain just as active. And yet although the voices of adverse judgment may not be silenced they are rendered futile by the simple fact that when Barrie reached the autumn of his career he was able to write as he wrote about George Meredith, whom he had lost as a beloved friend. 'Sharp spikes where flowers were': so Meredith himself once summed up a similar loss, and in a human sense it is an anguishing experience. And precisely to the extent to which the material man is not uplifted into a spiritual awareness of the true nature of so-called death, so will it be devastating, spiritually as well as materially, to see a loved one pass from us: so might it have been with Barrie at the passing of Stevenson, Greenwood, Captain Scott, Frohman, Robertson Nicoll, John Morley, and others whom the world was never to know. But in the little book about that supremely royal 'coronation' at Box Hill we have the logical consequence of a vision which is similar to that of Mozart a hundred years earlier. And the message of Mozart in music is strikingly akin to that of Barrie in literature. It is the message of the wind, and the flowers of the field. The world that has read Barrie's books and witnessed his plays would

have been less calm and sweet than it is, if the message had never come to it that each seemingly irrevocable farewell only makes grander, vaster, the kingdom of silence. To prevail against the evil denials of that grandeur and vastness a man must be humble and innocent. In no other way can he possess for his own the wisdom that reveals the life around him as but the reflection of a greater life, and life itself as having but a half-blind existence unless the radiance of eternity, its spring sunlight, illumines the footsteps and the vision of those who live it.

Fitly it is in the plays of his late maturity that Barrie most fully wrote that message. His remote interpretations of certain phases of human life; his bewildering and incredible lapses into the untempered negations of a cynic, or cheap and trivial wit, as an escape from the monstrous uncompromising actuality of things of which he himself had mordantly made his own interpretation and portrayal; they were part of his growth. Eventually he was to attain to a vision of life in which his faults and handicaps alike have been lost in a perfectly synthesised whole, made acceptable to his less rarefied fellowmen through the magic of his humour and sweetness and simplicity. To say, as some of his later critics will say, that he is only 'burking' life, is to assume that they possess the only legitimate attitude to life. How inconceivable that anyone can be so audacious! Barrie's view of humanity is tender and gently satirical, and when he writes at his

freest and most confident he arouses in us infinite pity and sympathy for those whom John Morley described as 'creatures who can love so much and yet are surrounded by the impregnable wall of death' – although in the light of deeper and maturer thought even Morley might have hesitated to use the word 'impregnable.' If Barrie has the power to do this, surely his attitude to life cannot be lightly dismissed. And Barrie can afford to remain undisturbed even if it is so dismissed. He is secure in his kingdom, from which that pity and sympathy radiate. It is thrillingly beautiful, splendidly his own – there are revelations of it in all the later writings – and Mr. Alfred Noyes, who once wrote as a poet would write about *Peter Pan*, has done right to point to that play as 'an exquisite illustration of a very ancient and beautiful phrase about the width and height and wonder of the kingdom of little children.'

*Dear Brutus, A Well-Remembered Voice, A Kiss for Cinderella, The Old Lady Shows Her Medals, The New Word, Barbara's Wedding*, and, finally, the most significant of them all, *Mary Rose*. . . . These plays belong to his third period and have all been produced in the theatre between 1917 and the present time, the first at Wyndham's Theatre on October 17th, 1917, and the last at the Haymarket on April 22nd, 1920. In each there is the love which the strong give to the weak; the author appears to be identifying himself with an equable and tender father-motherhood that may

not always be misunderstood. He seems to stand rapt before the wonder of childhood and a child's understanding. He gives the respect to which it is entitled, and the help ('it is the privilege of the old to help the young'). He is confident in a loving intimacy, a recognition that to babes and sucklings, actually and not in mere theory, is given the wisdom hidden from those who are children no more. The attitude needs courage, for it is not wholly instinctive: it means giving up so much that is considered necessary to the full exercise of what is glibly called 'the love of life.' But it was not for nothing that, as he recollects, on the evening of his first meeting with Captain Scott, just after the great explorer's return from his initial adventure in the Antarctic, he found himself unable to leave him. 'In vain he escorted me through the streets of London to my home, for when he had said good-night I then escorted him to his, and so it went on I know not for how long through the small hours.' Nor was it for nothing, moreover, that Barrie selected the theme of 'Courage' for his Rectorial Address to the students of St. Andrew's University, Scotland. Out of his own courage, moreover, was evolved the ennobling principle to which he has given public expression – and, of course, his words, spoken to the scholars of Wallasey High School for Girls that is presided over by his niece, were genially received by the outer world as the perpetration of yet another whimsicality: – 'I should like to give you a motto – something to strive

for—I should like to see it blazoned over the entrance to Wallasey High School—the words “That every child born into the British Empire shall have an equal chance.”’ It was after he had made the friendship of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, a Prime Minister of England that he said this; and he added significantly, ‘it will need courage.’

## III

And so we come to *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose*, two of the most effective plays he has written. By way of *A Kiss for Cinderella* and *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* we have travelled. In these two short pieces, the first played at Wyndham’s on March 3rd, 1916, and the second at the New Theatre a year later, Barrie finds, not for the first time, his heroes and heroines below-stairs. But in each instance, instead of a butler, the chief character is a charwoman. Thus Barrie has reminded us that if need be an artist may turn his back on the world as we have known it, and on the world’s pride and arrogance, finding among the humble and lowly his symbols of humanity’s enduring excellence. Not in regard to his charwomen and scullery-maids who, because of their humility and gratitude, are already queens of life, would he apply those lines from the speech of Cassius in *Julius Cæsar* about the fault not being ‘in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings’; they are applied to the case of his splendid unhappy ladies, his Lady Caroline



Laney, 'lately from the enormously select school where they are taught to pronounce their *r*'s as *w*'s; every woman who pronounces *r* as *w* will find a mate — it appeals to all that is chivalrous in man.' . . . Or his Mrs. Dearth in the labyrinths of whose mind lie 'murky beasts in ambush. . . .' Each of these ladies is introduced to us in the play whose title is taken from Shakespeare. The first stage directions in *Dear Brutus* are themselves an epitome of all that Barrie feels about the lives of these 'dwellers in darkness,' and about the darkness also: —

'The scene is a darkened room, which the curtain reveals so stealthily that if there was a mouse on the stage it is there still. Our object is to catch our two chief characters unawares; they are Darkness and Light.

'The room is so obscure as to be invisible, but at the back of the obscurity are French windows, through which is seen Lob's garden, bathed in moonshine. The darkness and light, which this room and garden represent, are very still, but we should feel that it is only a pause in which old enemies regard each other before they come to the grip. The moonshine stealing about among the flowers, to give them their last instructions, has left a smile upon them, but it is a smile with a menace in it for the dwellers in darkness. What we expect to see next is the moonshine slowly pushing the windows open, so that it may whisper to a confederate in the house, whose name is Lob. But though we may be sure that this was

about to happen it does not happen; stir among the dwellers in darkness prevents it.'

The 'dwellers in darkness' are a wastrel group of people who are given the 'second chance' they have sighed after with glib carelessness, and the idea of which has always been in Barrie's mind, for he expressed it even earlier than in *The Little White Bird* and *The Admirable Crichton*; indeed it first peeps out of *Walker, London* in the early nineties. They lose themselves in a magical forest that has sprung up on midsummer night in the grounds belonging to the mysterious, elf-like Lob (a symbol of conscience, perhaps, and the supposition is strengthened by his reincarnation in *Shall We Join the Ladies?*), although it can only be hazarded that Lob has had anything to do with the coming of the magical forest. They are transformed — but how vainly under the menacing smile! Not for them the second chance. Technically the play is convincing; the bridge between the actual and the true is built superbly. And arising out of the main idea is one unforgettable scene, that Barrie alone could have imagined, between an artist and the daughter who does not exist: —

'MARGARET (*critical, as an artist's daughter should be*). The moon is rather pale to-night, isn't she?

'DEARTH. Comes of keeping late hours.

'MARGARET (*showing off*). Daddy, watch me, daddy, look at me. Please, sweet moon, pleasant expression. No, no, not as if you were sitting for it; that is too professional. That is better; thank

you. Now keep it. That is the sort of thing you say to them, dad.

'DEARTH (*quickly at work*). I oughtn't to have brought you out so late; you should be tucked up in your cosy bed at home. . . .

'MARGARET (*pelting him with nuts*). I can't sleep when the moon's at the full; she keeps calling to me to get up. Perhaps I am *her* daughter too.

'DEARTH. Gad, you look it to-night.

'MARGARET. Do I? Then can't you paint me into the picture as well as mamma? You call it "A Mother and Daughter." Or simply "Two Ladies," if the moon thinks that calling me her daughter would make her seem too old.

. . . . .  
'MARGARET (*jiggling about*). I am so glad I am not a shade. How awful it would be, daddy, to wake up and find one wasn't alive. . . .'

#### IV

To write of *Mary Rose* is to recall Margaret the 'might-have-been.' To linger on the Island that Likes to be Visited, which provides the play's main setting, is to find ourselves very near to the Neverland. Mary Rose and Simon, her young husband, have packed up the remains of their picnic on the island, as happily as only lovers may. Cameron, the boatman, is discreetly awaiting them in the boat, reading a play by Euripides in the original. Mary Rose is sitting holding her

tongue with her fingers like a child, because Simon has just been telling her to 'dry up,' and she has retorted that she won't say another word.

'Something else is happening; the call has come to Mary Rose. It is at first as soft and furtive as whisperings from holes in the ground, Mary Rose, Mary Rose. Then in a fury as of storm and whistling winds that might be an unholy organ, it rushes upon the island, raking every bush for her. These sounds increase rapidly in volume till the mere loudness of them is horrible. They are not without an opponent. Struggling through them, and also calling her name, is to be heard music of an unearthly sweetness that is seeking perhaps to beat them back and put a girdle of safety round her. Once Mary Rose's arms go out to her husband for help, but hereafter she is oblivious of his existence. Her face is rapt, but there is neither fear nor joy in it. Thus she passes from view. The island immediately resumes its stillness. The sun has gone down. Simon by the fire and Cameron in the boat have heard nothing.

'SIMON (*on his knees*). I think the fire is done for at last. We can go now. How cold and grey it has become. (*Smiling, but without looking up*). You needn't grip your tongue any longer, you know. (*He rises.*) Mary Rose, where have you got to? Please don't hide. Dearest, don't. Cameron, where is my wife?

'CAMERON *rises in the boat, and he is afraid to land. His face alarms Simon, who turns this way and that and is lost to sight, calling her by name again and*

again. *He returns livid*). Cameron, I can't find her.'

Then he cries out her name again, and for those who have heard that cry it will resound through the world as long as men and women hold the belief that earth is cursed with partings and farewells.

## v

When Barrie wrote the scene in which Mary Rose is lost on that ghostly island, he was saying in his own unique way that until the threatening, material forces which close in upon human lives so ruthlessly are no longer our conquerors, our sacred childhood is guarded by the Spirit of Faery. The gods love those who remain children. Mary Rose never grew up, despite that she reached womanhood and even motherhood.

Her return to earthly existence is a spiritual experience through which we all must go at some terrible moment in our lives, for those of us who would seem to have lost every vestige of childhood make, sooner or later, a recovery of our pristine innocence, fleeting though the recovery may be, a lightning flash, less tangible in its coming and going than a dream. And yet it is so poignantly real to ourselves that when once again we find ourselves returned to fleshly existence we can hardly believe that mortal living may be so hemmed round with sorrow, suffering, hatred, and disillusionment. Why *have* we come back?

Vainly we echo the question that the old people in Barrie's play ask each other on the night of Mary Rose's return to her old home, in the tender care of Cameron, a young boatman when she vanished, but now an elderly minister. It is fitting that our survey of the work of James Matthew Barrie should end, as it does chronologically, with *Mary Rose*. For in this masterpiece he reaches his greatest height, dramatically as well as philosophically. There is nothing in the craftsmanship of modern drama that has the emotional intensity of that moment when Mary Rose, brought home after twenty years that have passed without her being aware, is confronted by her loved ones, who have been conscious of the passing of the years almost unbearably.

## VI

When Barrie turned from the writing of books to the making of plays he became the author of *Peter Pan*, *Mary Rose*, *Dear Brutus*, *The Admirable Crichton*, *Quality Street*. . . . The justification for a change to which his genius led him inevitably, nor could he have said it nay, lies in this magnificent contribution to the modern theatre. True, he has found a coarse lodging-place! But it has been finer for his gift, richer for the laughter and tears, the terror and adoration, that the legacy invokes. The mind and imagination that first bequeathed to our literature those half-wonderful, curiously blundering novels and tales,

*Auld Licht Idylls* and *The Window in Thrums*, *The Little White Bird*, the two books about *Sentimental Tommy*, and one flawless miniature, *Margaret Ogilvy*, has enveloped the English stage with exquisite veils of tenderness and humour, and the gentlest and most whimsical satire in our language. And James Matthew Barrie, steadfast in his loyalty to an ideal, has sought to tell us from what gracious skies those veils have fallen. 'For when you looked into my mother's eyes you knew, as if He had told you, why God sent her into the world — it was to open the minds of all who looked to beautiful thoughts. And that is the beginning and end of literature.'







